

^K MANHUNT

DETECTIVE STORY MONTHLY

MARCH
35 CENTS

A NEW
MICHAEL SHAYNE Novel

by

Brett Halliday

Plus—

JONATHAN CRAIG

HELEN NIELSEN

HAL ELLSON

BRYCE WALTON

—and others



"You can't make me . . ."
(See "EYE FOR AN EYE")

EVERY STORY NEW!

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The dead girl didn't have an enemy in the world. So, the cops figured, one of her friends must have stabbed her to death...

A Police Files Novelette

BY

JONATHAN CRAIG



The Temptress

THE FURNISHED sleeping room on the first floor of the old brownstone at 519 West 71st Street was fairly large and very clean. There was a barred window facing the street, an ornate fireplace with a square of sheet metal sealing off the grate and flue, and a radiator

enclosed in a box-shaped wire screen. The girl lay across the foot of the bed, her head extending a few inches beyond the edge of the mattress. She had been, I guessed, about twenty, a very pretty, very shapely girl with dark red hair and the smallest waist I had ever seen.

She was completely nude, and the only mark on her body was the tiny puncture just beneath her left breast.

I watched the assistant M.E. working over her for a moment, and then I said, "No sign of a sexual assault, Doctor?"

He shook his head. "None at all. The girl was a virgin, Steve. She still is."

"Nothing under her fingernails?"

"No. And none of them are broken. She didn't claw anybody. There's absolutely no indication of any preliminary violence whatever. Aside from the stab wound itself, I'd say her killer never touched her at all."

I stepped close to take another look at the wound. It was circular, had bled very little, and had been inflicted with a straight in-and-out thrust.

"She's been dead about two hours," the doctor said. "Fortunately, this is one of the times when we can come very close."

I glanced at my watch. It was 7:05 AM.

"Better give yourself a safe margin for error, though," the doctor went on. "Put down that she was killed sometime between four-thirty and five-thirty."

I entered the times in my notebook. "How soon can you do the autopsy?" I asked.

He frowned thoughtfully as he drew a sheet up over the girl's body. "I should be finished about

noon," he said. "The tox reports won't be in until sometime tomorrow, or maybe even later than that."

"You're through with her, are you?"

"Yes. There's nothing more I can do till I get her to the morgue."

I nodded, stepped out into the hallway to call the ambulance attendants, and then told the techs that they could finish the job they'd started before the doctor arrived. So far, the body had been photographed from several angles and the door had been dusted for prints, but that was about all.

2.

I got a receipt for the body from one of the ambulance attendants, and then walked back to the room where I had left my detective partner, Walt Logan, talking to the landlady. Walt was sitting on the arm of an easy chair. The landlady, a Mrs. Edna Hayson, was sitting at one end of an old-fashioned leather sofa. Mrs. Hayson was somewhere in her early fifties, a tall, big-boned woman with heavy facial features and short gray hair so thin that it revealed the paler gray of her scalp.

I sat down on the sofa and opened my notebook. "I've got the girl's name down as Marion Donnelly," I said. "Is that right, Mrs. Hayson?"

"No," Mrs. Hayson said in a

flat, hoarse voice. "It's Marian. M-a-r-i-a-n."

I nodded. "And you say you found her at exactly six o'clock?"

"Well, I couldn't say it was exactly, but it was within a couple minutes one way or the other."

"How can you be sure? Did you look at a clock?"

Mrs. Hayson smiled thinly. "Didn't have to. I keep my alarm set for five minutes of six. I shut the alarm off, and then I put my robe on and went down the hall to knock on Marian's door. I don't do much rushing around when I first wake up, and so I figure it took me about five minutes to get there."

"Was this a regular thing with you, Mrs. Hayson?"

"That's right. I woke her every morning. You take a real nice tenant like Marian Donnelly and you don't mind doing favors for her. I only wish all my tenants were as nice as she was."

"All right," I said. "You knocked on her door about six o'clock. You noticed the door was slightly ajar, and when she didn't answer, you looked inside."

"Yes," Mrs. Hayson said, frowning at me. "I've already told you all this."

"I know that, Mrs. Hayson, but I'd like to go over this part of it again."

She shrugged, sighing heavily. "Well, I don't know what else I can tell you. I just took one look,

and that was enough for me. I slammed the door shut and got on the phone."

Walt Logan leaned a little closer to Mrs. Hayson. He's tall and slim and scholarly looking, Walt is, you'd never take him for a cop at all. "You mean you didn't actually go into her room?" he asked.

She glanced at him sharply, as if his question had surprised her. "Why, no," she said, "Why should I?"

"I was wondering how you knew she was dead," Walt said.

Mrs. Hayson's lips twisted in that thin, mirthless smile again. "When you see a girl lying on the bed like Marian was, with blood on her chest like she had, and the kind of look she had on her face—well, you don't have to worry about her being dead."

"Why so early?" Walt said.

"You mean why did I wake her so early? Well, she worked at this restaurant just off Columbus Circle. She had to be there at seven."

I'd been studying Mrs. Hayson carefully, wondering at her coolness. Considering the fact that she had discovered Marian Donnelly's nude corpse scarcely an hour ago, her self-control was remarkable. It gave rise to several questions, but I kept them to myself.

"You heard nothing unusual in the house this morning?" Walt asked.

"No. I'm a sound sleeper."

"What did you do after you

called the police?" I asked.

"Mrs. Hayson smoothed back her sparse gray hair and sat up a little straighter. "I woke everybody up," she said. "You see, I got to thinking that maybe somebody else had been killed—that maybe Marian wasn't the only one. I have only four other people in the house right now, you know. Both the families on the top floor are away on vacation, and that leaves just Miss Grant, and Mr. Ramey, and the Hoffmans. Miss Grant has the first-floor rear. Mr. Ramey has the second-floor rear. The Hoffmans, they have the whole second floor except for Mr. Ramey's sleeping room."

"Were all these people in their rooms?" I asked.

"Yes."

Walt and I had asked the tenants to remain in their rooms until we had a chance to talk to them.

"You have any idea about who might have done this, Mrs. Hayson?" Walt asked.

"You know very well I haven't," Mrs. Hayson said. "Don't you think I'd have told you right away?"

"She ever mention being in trouble of any kind?" I asked.

"No."

"She was a very pretty girl," Walt said. "She must have had a lot of boy friends. What can you tell us about—"

"No," Mrs. Hayson said. "She didn't have a lot of boy friends. She broke off with the boy she

used to go with—the one that followed her here from her home town—and she hasn't gone with anyone since. They broke up about a month ago."

"What was his name?" I asked.

"Miller. Andy Miller. She told me once that he was the main reason she came to New York. She wanted to get away from him, but he followed her here, and she went out with him a few times before she finally threw him over altogether."

"You know where we can find him?"

"He works at the Maragon Garage, right up the street. I think he lives somewhere nearby too, but I don't know just where."

"This Andy Miller ever visit her in her room?" I asked.

Mrs. Hayson glared at me. "Certainly not. I don't permit my tenants to have visitors of the opposite sex. I never have permitted such a thing and I never will."

"You said that Miller followed her here from her home town," I said. "Where was she from?"

"Lima, Ohio."

"We'll want to notify her next of kin," I said. "Can you give us their address?"

"She had no next of kin," Mrs. Hayson said. "She was living with an uncle out there, but he died—let's see, I think she said it was a month or so before she came to New York."

"How long has she lived here?"

"About three months."

"What's the name of that restaurant where she worked?" Walt asked.

"Tyner's," Mrs. Hayson said. "It's just off Columbus Circle somewhere. I don't know the exact address."

"We'll talk to the other tenants now," I said, getting to my feet. "One last thing, though. Was Miss Donnelly on good terms with the other people in the house?"

"She hardly knew them — any more than to say hello to, that is."

"You're certain?"

"Of course. I know what goes on in my own house, don't I? Marian Donnelly minded her own business and kept to herself. The only one around here she ever talked to was me."

I slipped my notebook back into my pocket, motioned to Walt, and crossed to the door. After we'd moved along the hallway far enough to be out of earshot, Walt said, "You figure it was one of the tenants, Steve?"

"It's a little too early to do much figuring," I said.

"Well, if it was an outsider he must have come through the front door. The back door and both basement doors are bolted on the inside, and all the first-floor windows are barred."

"The doc got a pretty close fix on the time of death," I said glancing at my notes. "He puts the outside limits at four-thirty and five-thirty."

"What now, Steve?"

"Well, the techs should have finished with the girl's dresser by now. Suppose you see if you can find any letters or anything else that might give us a lead. I want to talk to the other tenants. Then we can split up and check her boy friend—the one that followed her from her home town—and the restaurant where she worked."

Walt walked back toward the room where Marian Donnelly had been murdered and I turned and knocked on the door of the first-floor rear, the room occupied by the tenant Mrs. Hayson had identified for us as Miss Grant.

3.

The girl who opened the door to my knock was about twenty-five, and extremely pretty. She was tall for a girl, about five foot eight or nine, with the kind of coloring that can't be classified as either blonde or brunette. She had light brown hair with golden highlights, a very white skin, and wide-set, slightly tilted eyes of the shade I've always thought of as amber. Her face was set in tight lines, as if she were determined not to show any emotion at all.

"I'm Detective Manning, Miss Grant," I said. "I'm in charge of the investigation."

She nodded, closed the hall door, and leaned up against it.

"This *would* have to happen,"

she said "today of all days!"

I glanced at her sharply. "What do you mean?"

"I mean I'll probably have to stay here all day. I was going out to see about a new job this morning, and now I won't be able to keep the appointment. Dammit, anyway. Why do these things always have to happen to me?"

I sat down on the arm of an overstuffed chair and opened my notebook. "How well did you know Miss Donnelly?" I asked.

"I didn't know her at all. I saw her in the hall a few times, that's all. I didn't even know her name, until I heard Mrs. Hayson say it this morning."

"Were you in your room all night?" I asked.

"Naturally. You wouldn't expect me to sleep in the hallway, would you?"

"You didn't hear anything?"

"Not a thing."

"What time did you come in last night?"

The amber eyes flared. "Just what is this, anyhow?"

"Routine," I said. "Do you mind answering the question, Miss Grant?"

"I got in about midnight—about a quarter past."

"You come in alone?"

"Of course. That old bat of a landlady sees that we never bring anyone past the front door."

"Anyone bring you home?"

"My fiancé. He had the cab wait

in the street, so he just brought me up to the door and then went right back down again."

"You ever see Miss Donnelly bring anyone into the house with her?"

"No."

"You ever hear her talking on the telephone? What I'm trying to get at, Miss Grant, is a connection between Miss Donnelly and the person who killed her. You ever hear her mention a man's name on the phone, or anything like that?"

"No. I don't believe I ever saw her use the phone at all."

"You ever notice any of the men tenants here in the house show an interest in her?"

"Men tenants!" Miss Grant said bitterly. "We don't even have any real men tenants in this house. A couple of the families are away just now, and all that's left are Mr. Hoffman and Mr. Ramey. Mr. Hoffman's about eighty years old. He can hardly get up and down the steps, let alone take an interest in a girl. And Mr. Ramey? My God, he's the kind that would run like hell if a girl even so much as smiled at him. He happened to see me straightening my stocking seams once, and I thought he was going to faint. He practically ran all the way back up the stairs."

"I see. How long have you lived here, Miss Grant?"

"Let me think . . . About six months now, I guess."

"And you're sure you can't tell

me anything more about Miss Donnelly?"

"What could I tell you? I didn't even know her name till this morning."

I got up and opened the door.

"Listen," Miss Grant said. "I don't want to lose out on that new job, and I've already told you everything I can tell you. Can't I leave? I mean, why should I have to suffer for something I never—"

"I'm sorry," I said. "We'll have to ask you to stay around for a while. You can call and explain what happened, if you like. They'll understand."

"Oh, sure. They'll understand, all right, but what good will that do me? They're sure as hell not going to hold the job open for me just because you've decided to hang me up this way."

"I'm sorry," I said again. "There's no way around it, Miss Grant."

"Like hell," she said, and slammed the door behind me.

I climbed the stairs to the second floor and knocked on the door of the room immediately over Miss Grant's. This was the room the landlady had said belonged to Mr. Ramey.

4.

Mr. Ramey was about forty, I judged, a small, fragile-looking man with a pinched, elongated face and receding blond hair. He had very small hands and feet and it

seemed impossible for him to keep either hands or feet still for more than a moment at a time.

I identified myself, closed the door behind me, and sat down on the side of Mr. Ramey's bed. There was a Bible lying open on the bed and several religious tracts were fanned out on the pillow. Three or four of the tracts had been marked heavily in black crayon. Several colored prints, based on religious scenes, were attached to the walls with transparent tape, and a very large print, fully twenty-four inches square, was taped to the upper part of a door that had apparently been sealed off from the next room.

Mr. Ramey, I found, sold Bibles and other religious publications. He told me with obvious pride and satisfaction that he had written and published over eight hundred tracts. Despite his nervous mannerisms, he spoke slowly and softly, and somehow he managed to give the impression that everything he said was first subjected to a careful inner scrutiny; his words were thoughtfully phrased and his tone was paternal.

Mr. Ramey said that he had never seen Marian Donnelly, either in the house or anywhere else. He'd heard nothing during the night. He had returned to the house about eleven, read his Bible for approximately half an hour, and retired. He'd slept soundly until the landlady awakened him shortly after the murder.

"What's your first name, Mr. Ramey?" I asked.

"Ralph. Ralph C."

"How long have you lived here?"

"Just a little over a week."

"And you never saw the dead girl even once in all that time?"

"No, never."

"You're from out of town?"

"Yes. Baltimore."

"Have you ever heard a man's voice from Miss Donnelly's room, or seen anyone going in or out of there?"

"No. I've seen no one in the house, really—except for the landlady and a young woman." He paused. "The young woman is rather tall and has light brown hair and eyes, but I don't know her name." His eyes grew reflective for a moment, and I wondered whether he was thinking back to the time he had seen Miss Grant straightening the seams of her stockings.

"This your first time in New York?" I asked.

"Yes, it is." He smiled faintly. "There's much work to be done here. It is, I'm afraid, a very wicked city. For a man in my line, the challenge is almost overwhelming." He glanced toward the Bible. "With God's help I hope to spread the word to the deepest cellar and to the highest penthouse. I am only one of God's soldiers, one of the lowliest, but my voice will be heard. And my voice, added to the voices of other men like myself,

will mount to a mighty roar that will . . . that will . . ." He broke off suddenly, smiling apologetically. "But that is not the problem at hand, is it? I'm sorry—please go on."

"You ever hear or see anything around the house that might give us a tie-in to the murdered girl?" I asked.

"I don't believe I quite understand what you mean."

"You ever hear anyone make a reference to Miss Donnelly?"

"I didn't even know her name."

"I know, but you might have heard someone refer to her as 'that girl in the first-floor front,' or 'that girl with the red hair.'"

He shook his head. "No, I'm afraid not."

"I see. Well, I guess that'll be all for right now, Mr. Ramey. We may want to talk to you a little later on."

"Does that mean you want me to stay in my room?"

"Yes."

"Very well. I'll use the time to plan my itinerary for the rest of the summer."

I left Mr. Ramey's room, walked past a bathroom, and knocked at the door of the last of the landlady's tenants, the Hoffmans.

5.

Mr. and Mrs. Hoffman were in their late seventies or early eighties. Mrs. Hoffman was in bed. Her

husband explained that the shock of the murder had been too much for her. I spoke to her briefly, decided that she could tell me nothing at all, and then followed Mr. Hoffman out to the living room. He walked slowly, with a bad limp—a very stooped old man with too much pride to use a cane.

When we had taken chairs, Mr. Hoffman said, "Now just who do you think it was killed that girl?"

"That's what we're trying to find out, Mr. Hoffman," I said.

He peered at me closely, a little distrustfully. "You mean you ain't got any clues at all?"

I shrugged.

"Well, now," Mr. Hoffman said. "Think of that." He shook his head. "Just think of that."

"Did you hear or see anything unusual last night?" I asked.

"What time last night?"

"Any time at all."

"Oh," Mr. Hoffman said. "Well, no; I can't say I did." He spoke reluctantly, as if this were the only interesting thing that had happened to him for a very long time and he hated being unable to supply me with information.

"Were you downstairs at all since, say, midnight?"

"Nope. Can't hardly get up and down those stairs any more. Me and them don't get along."

"How well did you know Miss Donnelly?"

"Well enough to speak to, is all. I tried to talk to her once or twice,

when I went down to get the mail, but she got a little uppity with me. You know how young folks are. . . . She was a right good-looking girl, though. Reminded me of a girl I used to know out in Seattle, about forty years ago. Now *there* was a real good-looking girl for you. By God, I remember one night when I—"

"Maybe we'd better stick to Miss Donnelly," I said. "You ever see or hear anything that might connect her with some man?"

Mr. Hoffman leaned back in his chair and squinted at me thoughtfully. "Not that I recollect," he said at last. "No, I guess I never heard nobody say anything about her at all."

"You never saw any man entering or leaving Miss Donnelly's room, or heard her mention a man's name on the phone, or anything like that?"

He leaned back and squinted his eyes the same way he had before. "No," he said, after he had thought about it for fully half a minute. "No, I can't honestly say I have." I felt a little sorry for him; he was trying to prolong my visit as much as he could, making the most of every opportunity I gave him.

I got up and walked to the door. "I'll let you know how we make out, Mr. Hoffman," I said.

"Do that," he said warmly. "I don't figure on moving a foot out of this apartment until we've got the killer." He bobbed his head and

his expression grew fierce. "Signed, sealed, and delivered, by God!"

I nodded. "I'll keep you informed."

6.

I went down the stairs and along the hallway to the first-floor front. Walt Logan was sitting on a chair near the bed, thumbing through a thin sheaf of papers. The techs were still busy with their cameras and fingerprint apparatus.

"Any luck?" I asked.

He tossed the papers on the bed. "No," he said. "Nothing but receipted bills and dress patterns and advertisements. It looks like she saved everything but letters. I'm beginning to think she never got any."

"Anything in any of the drawers?"

"Not a thing, Steve. Just clothes and junk and cosmetics. There's not a thing in this room that ties her to anybody else. Hell, I never saw anything like it. There isn't even a single photograph."

"Did the dresser look as if someone had gone through it in a hurry?"

"No. Everything was very neat and orderly. There was twenty bucks, all in dollar bills, right there in plain sight on top of some sweaters in the middle drawer."

"Hmmm. Well, maybe the killer wasn't interested in the money. Maybe the letters were where he

could get them without mussing anything up."

"You think the letters might be what he was after?"

"Could be. He sure as hell had some reason to be here, Walt. If it wasn't rape or robbery, what was it?"

"You've got me," Walt said. "How'd the other people in the house stack up?"

"No standout suspects, if that's what you mean."

Walt picked up the sheaf of papers and dropped them back in the dresser drawer. "She must have slept raw," he said. "There's not a nightgown or a pair of pajamas anywhere." He closed the drawer. "I guess we might as well hit her boy friend and that restaurant where she worked," he said.

I nodded. "I'll question the boy friend," I said.

"What was his name again?"

"Andy Miller."

"Yeah, I remember now. And you want me to take the restaurant?"

"We'll save a little time that way."

"Good enough, Steve. I'll see you at the squad room."

The Maragon Garage, where the landlady had told me Andy Miller was employed, was a little over a block away. I got into the department Plymouth, made a U-turn, and drove over there.

Andy Miller, it developed, was

not a mechanic but an accountant. He appeared to be about twenty-two or -three, a pleasant-looking, muscular man with short-cropped black hair and very white teeth. The pleasant look went away, though, when I told him I wanted to talk to him about Marian Donnelly. He closed his ledger book slowly and measured me carefully with eyes that had suddenly grown hostile.

"You a friend of hers?" he asked softly.

"No," I said. I showed him my badge. "I'm Detective Manning—Twentieth Precinct."

"What's the trouble?"

I glanced about the small office, then nodded toward the door. "I think we could talk better in the car, Mr. Miller. It's right outside."

"What's this all about?"

I crossed to the door and held it open for him. He hesitated for a moment, then shrugged and walked out to the Plymouth with me. When we were settled in the front seat, I said, "I understand you and Marian used to be pretty good friends."

"You mind telling me what the hell this is all—"

"This is police business, Andy. We'll have to do it my way."

"Listen! If Marian's in any trouble . . ."

"Just take it easy," I said. "Now, when was the last time you saw her?"

He sat erect on the edge of the

seat, very tense, glowering at me. "To talk to, you mean?"

"We can start with that."

"Well, it's been quite a while. About a week, I guess. I stopped her on the street and tried to talk to her, but she just kept on walking. It was me did all the talking—she didn't say more than a couple of words."

"You didn't see her after that?"

"Why don't you tell me what this is all about?"

I kept my voice friendly. "We do our job the way we see it," I said. "Just answer the questions, Andy."

He shook a cigarette from his pack and lit it very deliberately. "All right," he said. "Have it your way. . . . Yes, I saw her again after that. I've seen her almost every day since that time I tried to talk to her. She gets home from work about the time I get off, and I usually hang around and wait for her."

"Why?"

"Well, hell—to see her walk up the street, that's why."

"But you haven't talked to her again?"

"I told you I hadn't."

"You must still care for her quite a bit, Andy."

"So what if I do? What's it to you?"

"I understand you followed her here from Lima, Ohio."

"What if I did?"

"This'll go a lot easier for both of us if you leave the questions to me. Why did you two break up?"

"Don't ask me. I guess she just got tired of me, that's all. Maybe she didn't think I was good enough for her. She started putting on airs, and talking about going to college nights, and a whole lot of crazy things like that. She just changed completely. I thought she'd get over it, if I came here after her, but she never did."

"You think there might be another man in the picture, Andy?"

"Damned if I know. I thought sure I'd caught her with one this morning, but—"

"This morning? What time this morning?"

"About five o'clock, I guess. I don't usually get up till six, but this morning I couldn't sleep and I decided I might as well walk around till breakfast time. I walked past Marian's house, and there's this couple sitting there on the top step, smooching up a storm. I thought sure as hell the girl was Marian, and I started over there to take this guy apart. But then I saw it wasn't Marian after all. And it's a damned good thing it wasn't, or this guy would have had a damned sore head."

"Did this girl have light hair?"

"Well, sure. That's one of the things made me think it was Marian. But this other girl's hair wasn't red, like Marian's. It just looked reddish at first, the way the street light fell on it."

"Would you recognize the girl again?"

"No—I didn't get that close."

"How about the man?"

"Nope. I didn't pay much attention to him, except to notice that he was pretty big. Bigger than me, anyhow."

"You have any reason to think Marian has another boy friend?"

"It's just common sense, that's all. A girl like Marian doesn't go begging, and that's for sure. She could have almost anybody she wanted." His eyes moved over to mine and I saw that the hostility had been replaced with concern. "I know something pretty bad must have happened," he said. "What is it?"

I reached over and opened the door for him. "That'll be all for now, Andy. What's your home address, in case we want to talk to you again?"

"Six twenty-one West Seventy-Second," he said.

"Well, thanks for your help, Andy. Maybe we'll be talking to each other again."

He stared at me for a long moment. There was something more than concern in his eyes now; there was something pretty close to fear. Then he shrugged and slid out of the seat.

I left him there at the curb, made another U-turn, and drove back to the brownstone where Marian Donnelly had been murdered. After I had talked for a moment to the patrolman I'd posted on the front door, and learned that there had

been no new developments, I walked back through the hallway and knocked on the door occupied by Miss Grant.

7.

Miss Grant was not at all pleased to see me again so soon, and took no pains whatever to hide it. She had caught her long gold-brown hair at the nape of her neck in a pony tail and changed to a tight yellow dress with very little, if anything, beneath it. Her face was still set in the same tight lines and her slightly tilted eyes still flared angrily.

"Well?" she said.

"I believe you told me you came to your room about midnight last night, and that you didn't leave it again until this morning."

"So?"

"You're sure you weren't out front this morning—say about five o'clock?"

"I told you my fiancé brought me home about midnight."

"So you did, Miss Grant. I'm talking about five o'clock this morning."

She stared at me fixedly for several seconds, and then, slowly, her eyes moved away from mine and she moistened her lips.

"How about it, Miss Grant?" I said.

"Oh, God," she said softly. "Why do these things always happen to me? Dammit, it just isn't fair!"

"You were out there at that time, weren't you?"

"Yes—yes, I was there." She turned suddenly to face me. "Listen, officer. You've been around, you know what the score is—can't we—"

"Can't we what?"

"I mean can't we keep this to ourselves? None of this will help that dead girl one little bit, but it can sure play hell with me."

"You've lost me, Miss Grant. You mind telling me what you're talking about?"

"That man I was with out there this morning . . . well, he isn't the man I'm going to marry. I had a late date with him, after my fiancé brought me home. It was a crazy thing to do, I'll admit, but I—well, dammit, I just did it, that's all. And now, if my fiancé finds out about it, he'll . . . Oh, God! Why do these things always have to happen to me?"

"How long were you out there?"

"Almost two hours. It's kind of private like, there between the stone banisters, you know. . . ."

"When did you get there?"

"I guess it must have been a few minutes past four. We were at this bar up at the corner, and we came straight here after the bar closed at four o'clock. I didn't go inside until almost six. You know how fast time goes at a time like that."

"Why didn't you tell me this to begin with?" I asked.

"Why? You think I'm crazy? It

wouldn't have done anybody any good, and it would have done me a lot of harm. I have to look out for my own interests, don't I? If I don't, who will?"

"We'll let it go for now," I said. "Who's the man you were with, and where can I find him?"

"Listen. Isn't there some way we can keep this quiet? My God, think what'll it do to me."

"The time to think about those things is before you let them happen," I said. "Where can I reach this man, Miss Grant?"

"He—he tends bar at the Collinson Bar, just around the corner."

"Is he on duty now, do you know?"

"Yes. He works days."

"And his name?"

"Bill Markham."

I studied her for a moment. "Is there anything else you can tell me?" I asked. "This is our second go-round; I'd hate to think you were holding out on me again."

"No," she said earnestly. "I swear it."

"No one came in or out all the time you and this man were there?"

"No."

"You didn't see or hear anything at all?"

"No! Do you think I'm crazy enough to get myself into any more trouble than I'm in already?"

I turned toward the door.

"Please," she said. "For God's sake don't let my fiancé find out

about this."

"We'll see," I said as I opened the door.

8.

I spent a fast fifteen minutes with Mr. Markham, who backed up Miss Grant's story in every detail. I left the barroom with the conviction that both he and Miss Grant were telling the truth.

I drove to the restaurant where Walt Logan had gone to check on the murdered girl and took him back out to the Plymouth with me. After I had told him what I had learned, I said, "Miss Grant and her friend were out on those front steps during the time the murder was committed, Walt. It happened sometime between four-thirty and five-thirty, and Miss Grant and this man were out there for two hours, from four till six. That means the killer—if he was someone other than one of the tenants—must have entered the house before Miss Grant and her friend got there, and left after Miss Grant said good night to her friend and came inside. That's a long time for a man—assuming it was a man—to hang around, unless Miss Donnelly had slipped him into her room as a friend. I don't much think he was a friend, Walt. There's absolutely no evidence that Miss Donnelly entertained him as a friend last night. And of course there's no real reason to assume it was a man. It's

probable, but not certain."

"That's right," Walt said. "Whoever it was didn't stay long enough to leave any trace of himself at all. If the guy'd been there any length of time, you could tell. I'll go along with you, Steve—I can't buy the idea of a guy hanging around that house for more than two hours."

"Unless he—or she—was a tenant."

"And if not a tenant, then the landlady."

"Yes. Mrs. Hayson's another possibility. Remember how damned cool she was?"

"One thing, though, Steve . . ."

"What's that?"

"If it was one of the tenants, would he or she have killed her and then just gone back to his room and wait for the body to be discovered?"

"Maybe he had no choice. Maybe he started out the front door, saw Miss Grant and her friend there on the steps, and was trapped. He couldn't leave, and yet the longer he stood there the more chance there was that one of the other tenants might get up in the night and see him."

"Well, if he didn't leave the house he couldn't have ditched the murder weapon anywhere else except *in* the house. The trouble is, a wound like the one that killed Miss Donnelly could have been made by any of a lot of different things. It was a little too large to have been made with an icepick,

but the weapon had to be something like that, something round and pointed." He smiled wryly. "Hell, it could even have been a mechanical pencil. You remember the guy who got killed that way down in the Village?"

I nodded. "We'll have to give the house another going-over, Walt."

9.

When Walt and I got back to the brownstone, I used the pay phone in the hall to call Bellevue and ask the assistant M.E. for a progress report on the autopsy.

"We've got something for you, Steve," the doctor said. "I found a small lump of foreign matter in the wound—a little pellet about the size of a grain of rice. I turned it over to the lab here, and the techs say it's putty—putty, with a little green paint mixed in with it. Judging from that, and from the characteristics of the wound, the consensus here is that the murder weapon was probably something like a auger, or a drill, or a gimlet. The techs think the pellet was lodged in one of the grooves of the tool, and that the force of the blow loosened it enough for it to come out in the wound."

I thanked the doctor, hung up, and passed the information along to Walt. We decided to defer our search of the house until after we had talked to the landlady.

Mrs. Hayson told us that she

kept no tools about the house and that none of her tenants did either. Such repairs and adjustments as were necessary from time to time were made by the neighborhood handyman. This man—a Mr. Frank Curran—had installed a new shower rod in the second-floor bathroom only the day before. He was, Mrs. Hayson said, a rather sullen man who drank a great deal; but he did good work and charged comparatively little for it. He lived in a basement apartment several doors down the street.

While Walt called BCI for run-throughs on Mrs. Hayson, Miss Grant, Mr. and Mrs. Hoffman, Mr. Ramey, Mr. Curran, and the dead girl's ex-boy friend, Andy Miller, I went down the street to talk to the handyman.

Frank Curran was a tall, slope-shouldered young man with thick black hair and the flattened features of a man who has spent some time in the ring. He told me that he had installed the shower rod about four o'clock the previous afternoon. He had been interrupted in his work only once, when the landlady asked him to check an electrical outlet in her apartment. He had left his tools, except for a screwdriver, in the bathroom, and had returned to his work within ten minutes.

I examined Curran's tools, found no stains or evidence of recent cleaning, and then asked Curran to check the tools to see if anything

was missing. He found nothing missing on his first time through the box, but on the second he discovered that he was lacking a three-eighths-inch gimlet—a tool he hadn't used for several months. Curran seemed genuinely surprised that the tool was missing, and immediately became apprehensive. He told me that the gimlet, like all his tools, had been stamped with his initials for identification in the event of theft. The initials had been stamped into the metal itself with dies belonging to a machine shop for which Curran had once worked.

Curran told me he had spent the night drinking with friends in an apartment in the same building. I checked with the friends, who substantiated Curran's story and said they were willing to swear that he had not left the apartment from midnight until well after eight o'clock that morning.

I returned to the brownstone, told Walt Logan about the missing gimlet, and learned from Walt that the BCI had called to say that they had no record for any of the people we had asked about.

Our next step, of course, was to find out who had been in the house at about four o'clock the preceding afternoon. The landlady told us that only she and Mr. Ramey had been home at that time. She had seen the salesman come in about two-thirty and leave again about six. She had not spoken with him.

Walt and I climbed the stairs to the second floor and searched the bathroom. There was no gimlet in the flushbox or in any of the other common hiding places. We inspected the walls and doors, looking for peepholes, and found one almost immediately. It was in the putty which had been used to plug the keyhole in the sealed door leading to the room occupied by Mr. Ramey. The green paint, which covered both the door and the plug, had been chipped at the edges of the hole. The chipped places were newly made, and the manner in which the paint had flaked away from the putty proved that the gimlet had been inserted from Mr. Ramey's side of the door.

Walt straightened up, shaking his head. "I'll be damned," he said. "This Peeping Tom business always stops me. When it comes to boring holes in bathroom walls..."

"Or boring holes in people's chests with the same gimlet," I said. "Let's see what Ramey has to say for himself."

There was no answer to my knock on Ramey's door. I knocked again. "Open up, Ramey," I called. There was still no answer. I tried the knob, but the door was locked.

"I'll flip you to see who knocks it down," Walt said.

"Get Mrs. Hayson's key, Walt; it's easier on the shoulder."

Walt turned toward the stairs, and at that moment there was a scream from the first floor. Walt

and I ran down the stairs to find Miss Grant standing just outside her room, her mouth opened wide as if she were about to scream again. She pointed toward her open door. "In the courtyard!" she gasped. "Oh, my God! He . . ."

I ran into Miss Grant's room and looked out the window into the courtyard. Mr. Ralph Ramey lay on the bricks just outside the window, his small, thin body sprawled grotesquely. There was blood running from his mouth and nose and from a long gash across his forehead. Blood pumped steadily from the place where a broken bone had torn through the skin of his left forearm.

I called to Walt to phone for an ambulance, and then I ran to the back door and out to the courtyard. By the time the ambulance arrived I had stopped the flow of blood and taken the other first-aid measures I thought necessary. As I worked over him I kept glancing up at the rope he had fashioned out of bedsheets and suspended from his second-story window.

10.

Ramey regained consciousness two hours later, in a hospital bed under police guard. He was in a serious condition, but the doctors thought there was every chance of his pulling through. Ramey himself, however, was convinced that he was doomed and asked to make a dying declaration.

"I fell only one floor," he said in his soft, paternal voice. "Just one floor—and look at what it did to me. It was the will of God."

I glanced at Walt and then back at Ramey. "You want to tell us why you killed that girl?" I asked.

Ramey smiled at me in the same way a father might smile at his small son. "Of course," he said. "I killed her because she was evil. She was an instrument of the devil—just as I am an instrument of God. The devil told her to make me have evil thoughts, and God told me to punish her . . . to make certain she couldn't make other men have such thoughts."

"You told me you'd never seen the girl," I said.

"Oh, but I had," Ramey said. "Yes, indeed. I saw her several times, and each time I felt the evil in her. I felt the evil in myself. And then I was told to bore that hole in the door and observe her in the bathroom. So when I saw that tool box, I knew that God had provided it for me. I took that gimlet and—"

"Wait a minute," I said. "Who told you to do this?"

Ramey's sweat-sheened face stared back at me for a long moment. "You can't be serious," he said at last. "Certainly you must know who told me to do it." He closed his eyes for an instant. "He told me

to do it. Almighty God told me."

"He told you to steal the gimlet and bore the hole and then kill the girl?"

"Yes—of course."

"All right, Mr. Ramey. Go on."

"I carried out God's will—what more is there to say? I heard her come into the bathroom this morning, and I followed her back down the stairs. Oh, I was so quiet, you know. God silenced my footsteps. I carried the gimlet with me, of course, because I knew He would want me to use it. And when I reached the girl's door, I saw that she had left it a little ajar. I knew that God had made my task easy for me. . . ."

"What did you do with the gimlet?" Walt asked.

"I threw it over onto the roof of the building across the courtyard." He closed his eyes again.

I left the room for a few minutes to call the squad commander and tell him what had happened and to ask that he send someone to look for the gimlet. When I came back into the room, Walt was standing beside Ralph Ramey's bed and shaking his head slowly.

"Something wrong?" I asked. "He pass out again?"

"It looks like the doctors were wrong when they said they thought they could pull him through," Walt said. "The man's dead."



Paulie just wanted to hold up this old guy. He didn't know what we figured on, afterwards ...

BY WALTER KAYLIN



Split It Three Ways

ALL PAULIE wanted to do was take some money from this fellow. "He's got a bar in Santa Monica close to the beach," he said. "There's a vacant lot across the street where he parks his car. All we've got to do is wait over there

until he closes up. When he comes along, we take it from him. What do you say?"

We were having coffee in a drug-store on Figueroa Street, Paulie sitting across the table from Sal and me. He was wearing an Eisen-

hower jacket, a white shirt buttoned up to the neck and no tie. It was the first time we'd seen him since he'd gotten out of Leavenworth and he didn't look good, his face thin and blotchy, his eyes darting from one to the other of us until it gave me the jumps.

"Suits me," Sal said. "How about you, Willie boy?"

"Sure," I said. "Sure thing. Why not?"

"Now, you're talking," Paulie said, nodding very fast as though something had loosened up in there and he couldn't get it to stop. "Listen, we'll need somebody with a car. Larsen's a big guy and it'll take the three of us to handle him. How about Sylvia? That little Chev of hers really goes. Any kicks?"

"Not from me," Sal said. "She'll bring some class to the party."

If he meant it as a dig, Paulie was too wound up to notice it. You could see Sal was beginning to have himself a ball, though. After all, we were just kids when Paulie had been loose and wild and someone you were supposed to be very careful with. Now, here he was all sweated up about a routine-type thing. Of course, we hadn't seen him since he'd gone to Korea and then spent two years in Leavenworth for breaking up another GI and knocking him down a flight of stairs.

"All right, everything's all set, then," he said, getting up. "We'll meet at Floyd's at ten-thirty."

"Sharp?" Sal asked.

"Sure," Paulie said, not even knowing he was being ribbed. "Don't be late."

As soon as I got there, I could see it was going to be a bad night. They were all sitting in a booth and Sal had brought Gertrude. You could tell both he and Paulie were pretty sore. Gertrude was about seventeen and maybe there was nothing exactly wrong with her, but sometimes I thought there was nothing exactly right, either. She was square and chunky—something like Sal, himself—and all frozen in behind a white, fat face and eyes like green marbles thumbled into paste. She was wearing a mackinaw and black pants that tucked into her motorcycle boots.

Sylvia had her arm around Paulie's shoulders. She was a thin, dark girl and something of a drag. I mean she cried easy and got upset and even when we were kids we used to wonder why Paulie bothered hauling her around. Of course, she looked pretty good and dressed like a shark.

"Now, take it easy, honey," she said. "It won't do any good to get all excited."

Paulie was rolling an empty glass back and forth between his hands. His head was bent over it, but you could see a corner of his mouth twitching as though someone were tugging on it with a string.

"Here, I'll leave it to Willie," he said suddenly jerking his head up. "Did anyone say anything about bringing anyone else along, Willie? You were there."

"Well, what's the trouble anyway?" Sal said uneasily. You could see he felt maybe he'd pushed Paulie a little too far. "I forgot I had a date. Besides, all she'll do is sit in the car with Sylvia. What can happen?"

"It's not a way to do things," Paulie said looking down at the glass again. "You make arrangements, you're supposed to stick to them."

There was enough of a whine in it for Sal to move back in. He leaned forward and spoke as though he'd just learned Paulie's hearing wasn't too good.

"I said all she'll do is sit in the car with Sylvia," he said loudly.

"Well, be sure that she does," Paulie said and caught Gertrude's green-glass stare for a second, then turned away. "Let's get going," he said irritably. "For God's sake, how long are we going to sit around here?"

We drove past the lot across from Larsen's place and parked two blocks past it. Then we left the girls in the car and went back there. His car—a pre-war Olds—was about thirty feet into the lot from the sidewalk. We found a clump of rocks fifteen or so feet

past it and sat down behind them. We had a fifth of rye and began passing it back and forth, every once in a while one of us standing up to look across the street and see how near he was to closing.

"The car's turned right for us," Paulie said. "He'll have to come around this side to get in. I can get over there in a second. You two stay behind me so I can get a good crack at him. When he goes down, be sure and grab his arms just in case. I'll get the wallet."

He had brought a length of lead pipe along. As we sat there drinking and waiting for Larsen, he got on his knees and tried a few swings, first one-handed, then two. You could see he couldn't make up his mind.

"You should have thought of that before," Sal said. "This is a hell of a time to be practicing."

He was getting edgy, too. I guess I was in the best shape of all of us. That's because somehow I wasn't in it as deep as either of them. What with the rye tugging them on, they were pretty close to going at each other when two couples came out of Larsen's place and a minute later the lights went out.

"All right," I said. "Now, let's cut out the racket. He'll be here in a second."

We moved around to the edge of the rocks, Paulie in front holding the pipe. I could see drops of sweat on his neck over the Eisenhower jacket. Sal was on my left, his

mouth open and the smell of rye strong on his breath. Across the street, the door opened and a man came out and stood there a minute with his back to us, locking up. He looked big as a bear in his leather jacket, the moonlight gleaming on his bald head.

"Don't miss, for God's sake," Sal whispered. "That guy's a giant."

"Shut up," Paulie said without turning around. "Shut up, can't you? I know what I'm doing."

Larsen came toward us, picking his way around small rocks and singing "Stardust" in a high-pitched moony way, probably imitating something on his juke box. When he got close to the car, he took out his keys and came around it. As he put a key in the door lock, Paulie jumped for him, but too soon. Larsen saw it coming, jerked back and caught it on his shoulder.

"Hurry up," Paulie shouted throwing himself at him. He sounded frantic. "Hurry!"

We rushed at him and bowled him over, but holding him down was something else again. He was strong as a horse. I had him by one shoulder, but the way he was whipping that arm around, it was almost impossible to hang on. Sal was having the same trouble on the other side and Paulie wasn't getting anywhere trying to reach into his pockets.

"Can't you hold him?" he gasped, and all the time Larsen was pulling a leg up under himself and getting

ready to try getting up. He wasn't hollering. He didn't look worried, or even sore. He'd probably been a wrestler or something. We were just like kids the way he was tossing us around. I knew if he ever got up we wouldn't have a chance with him. Then I felt someone move in next to me.

"Watch it," Gertrude said.

"What the hell—" I began, and then she stepped around me and kicked at his head. It caught him good and he went down on his back with blood leaking out of his ear. She'd caved in the side of his head, but even then he wasn't through. In a second, he was straining to lift himself again, his eyes rolling like he'd gone mad.

"I can't hold him," Sal shouted, and a second later Larsen had his arm free and was swinging it over at me. He'd thrown Sal and Paulie off him like they were mice and now instead of me having him, he had me.

"Grab him," I hollered, trying to squirm away and then, from next to me, Gertrude kicked at him again. He caught it full in the face and was probably through right there, but she gave him another to make sure.

Even then, he wasn't out, but he just lay there without moving while Paulie went through his pockets. His eyes were closed and he was shivering like a dog after a truck's hit it. His face was in awful shape. He just stayed like that until we

had his money and were running to the car.

Paulie counted the money on the way out to the beach. He was sitting in front with Sylvia, the rest of us in the back, Gertrude in the middle. We intended staying out at the beach for half an hour or so, then coming back into LA by some other route.

"Seventy-two bucks," he said. "Well, I thought we'd do better than that."

He sounded tired and fed up, almost as though he wished the whole thing had never happened. I wasn't exactly singing myself, but Sal was feeling pretty good. He had his arm around Gertrude's shoulders, laughing and telling her she was the "greatest" all the way to the beach. If Gertrude heard him, she never showed it.

We parked a block away, then walked over to the beach and down to the water. Sometimes you see people picnicking out there, but this time it was too cold. The moon was still out, though, and we could see well enough to divide the money without lighting a match. The sand was too cold to sit on, so we stood up while Paulie began separating it into different-size bills.

"Seventy-two bucks split three ways," he said. "I figured it out in the car. Twenty-four bucks apiece."

"Why three ways?" Gertrude asked.

"Sal, Willie and me," Paulie said. "Why not me?"

She was standing in front of him with her hands in her mackinaw pockets, her face looking like lumped dough in the moonlight.

"Look, nobody invited you in the first place," Paulie said and he pointed the hand with the money in it at her and you could see it shaking. "We would have taken him whether you were there or not and we wouldn't have had to almost kill the guy—"

She took one hand out of her pocket, a length of bicycle chain wrapped around her knuckles, and swung at him. It caught him on the forehead and for a second the link marks were clear as brands. Then the blood filled them in.

"Oh," Sylvia said and her hand jumped to her lips.

Paulie just stood there as though he couldn't believe what was happening. He began to shake his head and then she hit him again. This time he went down, but rolled over and got on all fours. He was starting to get up when Gertrude moved in on him again and lifted her knee into his face knocking him over on his back. When she stepped toward him again, I thought she was going to go on with it, but all she did was bend over and start picking up the money.

"What's a quarter of seventy-two?" she said when she had it all.

"Eighteen," Sal said.

She divided the money into four stacks, handed one to me, one to Sal and offered one to Sylvia who was on her knees dabbing at Paulie's face.

"Here," she said. "You want it?"

"No, that's all right," Sylvia said. "I don't want it."

"You sure?" Gertrude asked.

"I'm positive," Sylvia said firmly.

"Okay," Gertrude shrugged, putting the money in her pocket. "I'll keep both of them."

It was a quiet trip back to town. Even Sal didn't say anything. Once or twice he looked at Gertrude uneasily as though wondering what she'd pull next. Paulie rode with his head resting on the back of the seat, a handkerchief pressed to his face.

When we were close to downtown LA, Paulie said he wanted to go to Floyd's and get a drink. It was the first thing he'd said all the way. I said I could use one, too, and Sal said he'd go along. Sylvia said she'd pass it up and no one was about to ask Gertrude. We stopped in front of Floyd's and the three of us got out. Sylvia put her head out the window to kiss Paulie. She was smiling.

"I'm going to drop Gertrude off," she told him. "Don't you boys drink too much."

We went in and ordered a round.

"I never was able to hit a woman," Paulie said. "It's the one thing I never was able to do."

He looked terrible. It wasn't only that his face was cut up. He looked like an old man, all shrunken into himself and beat up, beat up from the inside out.

"Well, if one ever needed it, to-night—" Sal began.

"We could have used the dough," Paulie said moodily, paying no attention to him. "We were going down to Tijuana and celebrate me getting out."

We got our drinks and drank them, then put away a second round and ordered a third. They weren't doing us any good. I mean, Paulie was glooming in something all his own and Sal and I were wondering why we didn't forget it and go on home. Then Floyd's guy brought us the third round and, as he left the table, we saw Sylvia coming toward us.

She walked up to the table and dropped a roll of bills on it right under Paulie's nose. She was smiling at him, a strange, winner's smile I'd never seen on her before, her eyes shining like a big cat's.

"Thirty-six dollars," she said. "That should get us to Tijuana."

"Where did you get it?" Paulie asked. He looked puzzled and tired and a little tight.

"From Gertrude."

I felt everything inside my clothes begin to crawl. Sal's face looked wet and he didn't know he was

holding a drink. Sylvia was leaning forward, bending in over Paulie till he had to back up to look at her straight.

"How?" he whispered.

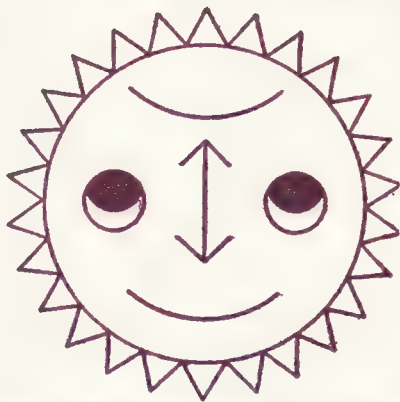
"Don't you know?" she laughed. "My God, isn't it written all over her?"

Then Sal let his breath out in a long, low sigh and I bent over my glass.

"Jesus Christ," Paulie whined. "Jesus Christ, I can't keep up with anything any more."

He got up and went out of there without touching the money. As he went past the window we could see him buttoning up the Eisenhower jacket. I had a picture of him doing that a lot from then on, slouching in and out of places and buttoning up that old jacket.

"He'll be back," Sylvia said but she didn't look sure. Maybe she was thinking the same thing I was. I mean, all Paulie had wanted to do was take a little money from this fellow.



LET'S LOOK AT THE BRIGHTER SIDE

Many thousands of Americans are cured of cancer every year. More and more people are going to their doctors *in time*...To learn how to head off cancer, call the American Cancer Society or write to "Cancer" in care of your local Post Office.

American Cancer Society





Lend Me Your Gun

We just had this war with another gang, that's all. But those damn bulls had to make the war their business ...

BY HAL ELLSON

THE COMMUNITY CENTER is okay, but a bunch of squares run it. They figure we don't know they're trying to bust up the gang.

We know better, so we don't join. We just come around for the dances, and to meet the girls. It ain't a bad place, so we don't give the people no trouble, and they let us be.

Everything's jake till this other clique moves in. We don't like that but there's nothing we can do about it. Not till the Cardinals come back after a dance and smash the windows and set fire to the awning in front of the Center.

They don't get caught, and the people at the Center blame us. They tell us not to come around no more. That does it. We don't want a rumble with the Cardinals, but we got to set things straight.

Me and three more studs from our clique go around to talk to the Cardinals. There's eight of them outside the poolroom where they hang out. I count them. More is inside. There's four of us.

Wingo's our president. He ain't big, but he's hard and afraid of nothing. He talks up, tells them they got to straighten us with the Center or there's going to be trouble.

They laugh at us. Then Chick, this big wheel of the Cardinals, comes along.

"What's the trouble?" Chick says.

Wingo tells him straight off, and Chick laughs.

"You know what you punks can do, don't you?" he says.

That's it. I don't see who swings first. Wingo and Chick are at each other. The rest of us watch like it's going to be a fair one.

But that don't happen. Soon as Wingo starts dishing it out to Chick, the rest of his mob moves in.

That's a sign to breeze. I yell to Wingo, and we all bust away, clear the neighborhood, nobody's caught.

That ain't the end. We spread the word and everybody meets at the Rathole, the poolroom where we hang out.

We talk it over. Wingo's ready to flip. He wants to go right back and clean out the Cardinals.

I talk him down and tell him, "They caught us short and would

have given it to us bad. Let's get some of them the same way."

He cools, sees it my way, and we wait for night, borrow three cars and ride into Cardinal territory, looking for them.

Ten o'clock we spot six of them coming out of an ice cream parlour with some broads. No cops is in sight, so we swing for the curb and jump out.

They see us, know what's coming and start to run. Four of them cut into a church. Two make for a side street.

We let the four slide, go for the two and catch one halfway up the side-street. The other runs down an areaway

He traps himself. Six of us drag him out. The first one's down already in the middle of the gutter.

We knock them both down, pick them up and knock them down till they can't stand no more. Then we stomp them flat till a woman opens a window and starts screaming.

We cut the scene, go back to the neighborhood and celebrate on a couple of cases of beer.

Next day a Cardinal punk comes to the Rathole with a challenge to have it out at the dumps. We take them up, and the deal's on.

The same night all of us Ramblers is at the dumps. Everybody's got weapons. There's a couple of guys with pistols, two guys with .22 rifles. We're ready for them.

We pick our side of the dumps, the Cardinals the other. The orange lights of the Parkway is behind them. I count twenty-four of them, and Wingo starts firing.

That's it. Everybody hits for cover. I drop behind a water boiler, and fire at the dark. There's nothing across the dump now. Just the orange lights of the Parkway, and cars skimming like shadows.

It stays quiet for a while. Then it's like everybody's shooting at once. A bullet hits the boiler me and Wingo are using for cover.

That scares me and I keep my head down.

Wingo fires a couple more. It goes quiet after that, and we wait. Finally I look over the boiler. Nothing's out there but shadows, and I don't know what they are.

"What do you see?" Wingo asks. "Nothing. They ain't moving."

Wingo pops his head up. "What's wrong, you punking out, you bastards?" he yells.

Two shots answer, and Wingo ducks.

It's quiet again.

Ten minutes later it's still quiet. Then I hear sirens. They're far away, but they can mean only one thing.

"Cops," Wingo says, and we're up on our feet.

Everybody's up. Shadows are moving across the dump. The Cardinals are cutting out fast.

Nobody fires now. The sirens are screaming louder. Four squad cars

swing off the Parkway, race through the dumps with headlights blazing. They stop, and the cops pile out, haul their guns.

"Throw your weapons," Wingo says, and he cuts out.

Some of the others follow. I'm ready to fly, but the cops are moving in. I don't want to get shot, so I fling my gun away and wait.

Wingo and six others make it. Eleven of us are caught. They take us to the station house, shove us in a cell.

I don't feel like going in. Yeah, a chop in back of the neck and I fall in with half my head off. The others see that and walk in quiet.

There's a light in the cell, a couple of benches. I rub my neck and look around. Nobody's talking. The cops is gone. I hear their steps on the stairs, hear them laughing, and turn to Zootie.

He don't look scared. Next second he takes command.

"All right, nobody says nothing," he tells us. "Remember that. Everybody has the same story, and nobody squeals on the guys that got away."

The cops come down later and we stop talking. I hear them on the stairs, and they ain't laughing now.

So I know what's coming. We all do. It ain't the first time we been picked up. I been in this crib before. Three times in this one, five times in other station houses.

I know what it's all about and I ain't scared, just a little on edge, cause I know what's going to happen.

One time I was picked up for robbing a store and the cops worked on me. I think of that now. We're all doing a little thinking.

The cell door opens and we look up. The cop that hacked me steps in. He's got four more bulls with him.

Maybe he knows Zootie. "All right, tough guy," he says to him. "You're first. Come on."

Zootie looks at him bad, walks to the door, takes his time. Yeah, he ain't scared.

The cop's waiting. He's a big guy with a face like the color of dough, eyes like two blue marbles. You don't know what he's thinking, and he don't look sore.

Looks don't count. Zootie passes him and he raises his hand, chops hard. That's it. Zootie goes flying.

He stumbles into the other cops and they grab him. That's when he comes to life, starts fighting, tries to get the cop who hit him. The others hold him, and one of them says, "Take it easy, George, he'll get his upstairs if he don't talk."

The big cop don't answer, don't look at the others. He turns to us and says, "Maybe that'll teach the rest of you to move fast when you're told to move."

He slams the door shut, and we listen, hear them go upstairs. The cops is talking to Zootie, trying to

quiet him. He still wants to get the big cop.

Yeah, crazy Zootie. They want him to come at them so they can do him in.

Me, I prefer to play it cool. Do it the easy way, I say.

Nobody's talking now. We listen, but there's nothing to hear. We're expecting to hear Zootie, but he's tough. He ain't going to talk, no matter what they do.

That's what I like about him. I look at the others and wonder. Tony looks scared. So does Dig. Maybe they'll talk.

Tony sees me watching. I turn away, wonder who's next on the list. I'm kind of nervous, but I want to be next and get it over. Maybe they'll make me talk, but I don't think so. No cop ever did yet.

Later, they bring Zootie back. The door opens upstairs and I hear them come down. They take Zootie along the passage, put him in another cell, then come back.

They're laughing again, and I feel like yelling out. The cell door opens. The big cop comes in and I start toward him.

"Where the hell do you think you're going?" he says.

"I'm next," I tell him.

"Oh, so you're a brave guy."

He puts his hand on my chest and shoves me back. I fall, pick myself up.

The cop points to Socks. "You, good-looking."

Socks starts moving. I see a white

spot on each side of his nose and I know he's scared. But he ain't going to talk.

Next they come for Tony. Then Dig. Later, they bring them down and throw them in with Zootie.

The rest of us look at each other. Nobody says anything, but I can see they're all thinking the same—that Tony and Dig talked.

I'm next on the list. I figure to be last, but the big cop opens the cell, looks at me and says, "Come on, brave guy."

I give him a bad look. That's all. Otherwise, I move fast so he don't hack me again.

Going up the stairs, my legs feel weak but when I reach the top I want to make a run for it and stop myself. Running's stupid, I won't make it.

They take me in a room where there's a lot of desks. I look around. A cop nods to a chair.

I move to it. Another cop and two dicks are waiting for me. I don't feel like sitting, but I know I got to.

I sit and the two dicks and the cop turn to me. Their faces look all the same.

One is a fat soft-looking guy with small eyes. His collar is open, and he's got a cigarette in his mouth. It's a small tight mouth and I don't like it. There's nothing about him I like.

"What were you fighting about?" he asks me.

"The Cardinals got us in

trouble," I tell him.

"What kind of trouble?"

"We got thrown out of the Center cause of them, so we was having it out. Also, they was fooling around with the sister of one of our guys."

"How many were in the fight?"

I knew this was coming so I say, "I don't know exactly. Eleven, maybe twelve."

"Maybe you can't count. There were more."

"No, that's how many. Eleven or twelve."

That's when he slaps me. Yeah, it was a real stinger, but I don't show nothing.

"You don't have to do that," I tell him. "I ain't lying."

"You sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure."

When I say that I see this cop near the door. Soon as I look at him he comes over. He don't say a word. He's a real built guy with brown hair.

Wham! He catches me across the legs with the hose.

"You don't like that, do you?" he says.

"No!"

"Goddam, don't answer me," he says, and I get it again, harder.

I close my eyes but don't cry out. That's all for him. He goes back to the other side of the room and leans against the wall.

But the others ain't done yet. I know that and wonder what's coming next. I don't have long to

wait. The fat one starts again.

"Are you sure that's' how many of you were in the rumble?" he says.

"Yeah."

"How many times have you been in trouble?"

"A couple of times."

"All right, who were the ones who ran?"

He shoots that at me fast to catch me off guard, but I stay calm and tell him, "I didn't see no guys run away."

It's easier than I thought it'd be. The fat guy says, "All right, don't get in any more trouble."

He moves away, and I stand up. I'm still expecting one of the others to slam me. Maybe the one with the hose'll come back and let me have it.

Nothing happens. They take me back downstairs, put me in the second cell.

My pals are holding their legs and moaning. My own legs is numb from the hose.

We wait till the cops finish with the others. Everyone gets the treatment, some worse than the others.

Next, the cell door is opened. We go upstairs to the desk and the sergeant takes our names, addresses, and some other stuff.

That's all. They let us go and we cut back to the neighborhood and the candy store where we hang out when we're not in the poolroom.

We don't stay long, cause no-

body's in the mood to hang around.

"What do you figure'll happen?" I say to Zootie.

"Maybe we'll know tomorrow."

That's what I figure. Cause for Zootie and me and some of the others, it ain't over. The only ones who got a chance were never picked up before.

They're in the clear. So is Wingo and the guys who got away with him, cause as far as we know, Tony and Dig didn't squeal.

We split the scene. A couple of us move on to the poolroom. Wingo and the others are waiting there.

"What happened?" Wingo says.

I'm feeling beat and I don't say nothing. Zootie does the talking, tells him what the cops done to us. He's down on the cop who hit him, swears he's going to get him.

The others don't believe him, but I do. Zootie's crazy enough to try it.

"You should have cut out with me," Wingo says. "Never stand when you got a chance to run."

Yeah, that's easy to say now. But suppose we all ran? The cops would have shot somebody. But I should have cut with the others. I might have made it. Now I'm worried cause I don't know what's going to happen."

A little later I hit for home. My mother ain't up. That's okay.

I go to my room, undress and lay in bed. My legs still hurt from

the hose. They hurt plenty.

I'm tired, too, but can't sleep. Cause there's tomorrow to think about. Something's going to happen.

I finish a pack of butts, then turn to the wall. It's late now, the house is quiet. There's no sound from the street, but the wind's starting to blow.

I hear it outside. It rattles the window, fades and comes back harder.

Cold is creeping into the room. I feel it and put my arms under the covers.

The wind keeps blowing. That's the last thing I hear before I fall asleep.

Early next morning my mother comes into my room and calls me. I don't want to get up so I make believe I'm asleep. She shakes me then and I got to open my eyes.

"What time did you come in last night, Nick?"

"Don't know. I'm tired, let me alone."

"Aren't you getting up? Your breakfast is on the table."

"All right, give me a chance."

I see she's angry, but she ain't got time to argue. She's got to go to work, so she gives me a bad look and walks out.

I hear her in the kitchen. She calls me from there, and I don't answer. Finally she goes into another room in a hurry. Her high

heels make a racket.

I hear her coming toward my room again and I jump up, pull my pants on. She starts at the door. By that time I'm putting on my socks.

"Breakfast is on the table, Nick."

She turns to go, and I say, "How about leaving me a quarter?"

I get a bad look and she turns away.

"How about it, Mom?"

"I'll leave it on the table, but don't go back to bed again."

She's gone. I hear her in the kitchen. She stops, then I hear her again. The front door opens. It slams shut and the window in my room rattles. After that it's quiet in the house, empty as hell.

I finish dressing, light a butt and hear steps on the sidewalk. People are going to work, traffic's moving, but it's early yet and the house still feels empty.

Somebody comes down the stairs then. Heavy steps. That's a man going off to work. The door closes downstairs, and the house feels emptier.

I go to the kitchen. Everything's ready, coffee, cereal, bread and jam. A quarter's laying on the table. I pick it up, give it a flip and drop it in my pocket.

The wind ain't blowing now. That's why it's so quiet in the house. I'm glad of that, glad it's day, cause I don't like the night.

I drink a little coffee, have a piece of bread and jam, and get up

from the table. My mother's cigarettes is in the living room. I take six and shake the pack so she won't know nothing, and light up.

After the butt I don't have anything to do but read the paper and look out the window. By that time it's nine o'clock and the street is quiet again. It's still too early for the poolroom to be open. Anyhow, I don't feel like moving. It's cold out. I stand near the window, look out, wait for something to happen and nothing does.

Okay. So I hit the bed again, sleep till twelve. A factory whistle wakes me. The room's bright now, the yellow walls look ugly.

I go to the kitchen, see the table just like I left it, and don't feel like eating.

It's better out. I slip into my Eisenhower, go down the street, buy a pack of butts at the corner and walk to the poolroom. Some of the boys is there already. They all look up as I walk in.

There's no news. Nobody's heard anything about last night. I don't know a thing, either, but I still got that feeling that something's going to happen and I'm worried.

I don't show it. Some of the others is worried, too. There's only one thing on Zootie's mind. He wants to get the cop who hit him.

"Cool it," I tell him. "You can't fight the cops."

"That's what you think. That bull ain't getting away with nothing." I don't like his eyes.

"Yeah, you're going to take care of him."

"You think I can't?"

"Let it slide, Zootie. You can't hurt him. You're only looking for trouble."

"That's what I want."

Wingo's listening and steps in. "Lay off," he tells Zootie. "That's an order. We don't want trouble with the cops."

"Yeah, you can talk cause you didn't get it."

"I told you what to do. You better do it."

Zootie stays shut but I see he's boiling. He ain't going to forget.

An hour later I drift from the poolroom. In the street I don't know where to go, what to do. There's only a nickel in my pocket, and that ain't enough to pay for a show.

Only one thing to do. I buy a paper and hit for home. It's too cold to stay out.

Soon as I'm back, I heat the coffee, fry two eggs and read the paper. After that I go to the living room. The dirty dishes can wait till later.

It's warmer in the house now. I turn on the radio, stretch on the couch. A little later I fall asleep.

When I wake up, it's dark in the room and somebody's there. I don't know who and I jump up scared. It's my mother.

"Is that all you have to do, lay around and sleep all day?" she says.

Yeah, she's sore about the dishes.

They're still on the kitchen table like I left them.

We start arguing, so as soon as I get the chance I cut out, hit the street and move to the Rathole. Zootie's standing outside with his hands in his pockets.

"You trying to freeze to death," I tell him. "Come on inside."

"No, man, I'm waiting for you."

"What for?"

"You got something I need."

"Like what?"

"That little old .22."

"That's a private piece, Zootie. It ain't for handing around."

"Man, you won't lend it to a friend?"

"What for? There's nothing on."

"With me there is."

"Sorry, man, I can't let you have it. You're only going to be in trouble."

"Look, it ain't like what you think. I ain't after that cop. I'm cool now."

"Then stay cool."

"You won't lend it?"

"No, let it lay."

We go on like that till he talks a hole in my head and I bust down. It ain't the thing to do, cause I know what he wants the pistol for. I don't want to give it, but I do.

We go down my cellar, get it, and come up to the street again. That's all. He cuts out, and I go back to the Rathole till closing time, then sleep at Wingo's house instead of going home.

Next morning I got to report to

my probation officer and I don't want to go cause I hate the guy's guts. Twice a week I see Mr. Brandon, and he don't give you a chance. He asks too many questions, wants to know what I do every hour of the day.

His office is in the court building, upstairs. I get off the subway, walk up the stairs, knock on the door and let myself in.

Mr. Brandon's secretary looks up. I give her my name and card and she punches it, touches a button on her desk.

"Another boy to see you, Mr. Brandon—Nick Sarro," she says, and she tells me to sit.

I sit and give her the once-over. Always chewing gum, but she's kind of cute. There's a flower on her desk, a white rose this time. She keeps typing, but once in a while raises her eyes and looks at me.

Mr. Brandon takes his damn time and finally opens the door of his office.

"Nick," he says.

I get up and go inside with him.

"Okay, sit down."

This time I feel real uneasy and I don't want to sit.

Mr. Brandon goes to a window, looks out, lights up, turns around and stares at me. I know he's examining my clothes. He always does that.

"How are you doing, Nick?"

"All right, I guess."

"How are you doing at home?"

"All right."

"Getting in early nights?"

"Yeah."

"Getting in any more trouble?"

I knew all the while he was coming to this. He always does. But this time it's different. I can tell by the way he looks at me, like he knows about the rumble with the Ramblers the other night. I'd tell him, but since he's so wise, I say, "I ain't been getting in any trouble."

I figure him to call me a liar, but all he does is throw me a queer look and a smile I don't like.

"Okay, you can go, Nick."

I move out fast, pass the secretary. She looks up and gives me a smile. I say goodbye to her and walk out. But something's wrong.

Mr. Brandon didn't say nothing, and that ain't like him. Something's real wrong.

I know it when I reach home. Cops is waiting for me. They slam the bracelets on me before I can talk, ask me where I got the gun.

"What gun?" I say like I don't know nothing.

"Look, don't be smart. Your pal Zootie ratted on you, and you're in trouble."

"You mean Zootie's in trouble. Anyway, I don't know what you're talking about."

"Then we'll tell you. Zootie tried to shoot a cop last night with a gun you gave him. We know you gave it to him, kid, because he told us that before he died."



THE SHORT, stocky one put it on the line five minutes after Gladys was in the joint. He took a stool beside her at the bar and he said, "How about it, Babe?"

No one knows when the vice

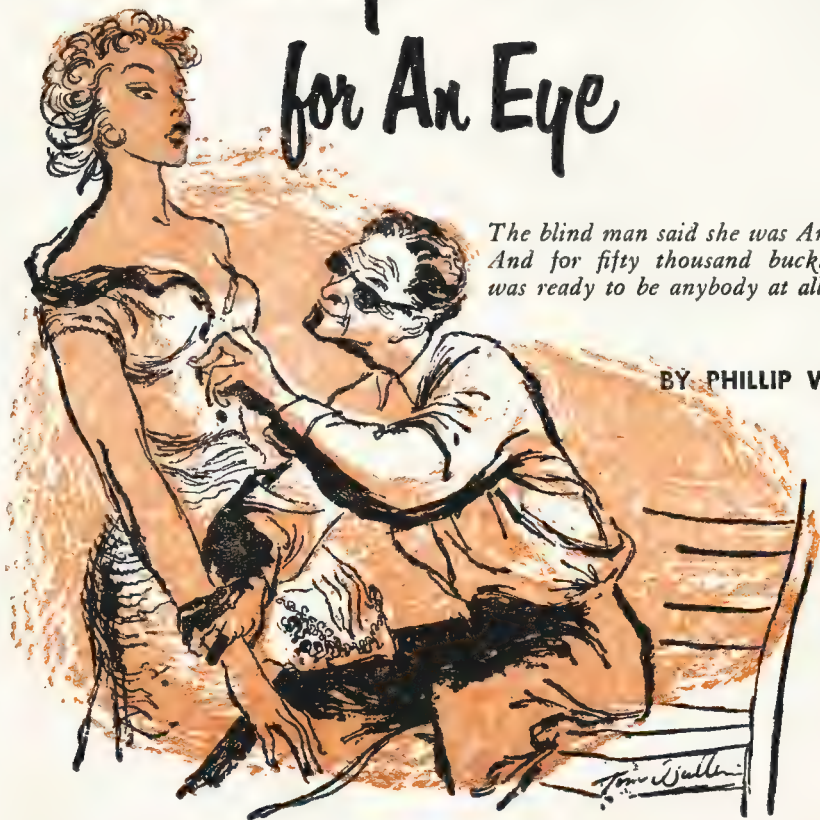
squad brings a new man in or some other cop is trying a shake-down and the girls have a stock answer. "How about what?" Gladys asked.

"How about a drink to start with?" He looked her up and down carefully, intimately, his gaze lingering on the skirt wrapped tight around her crossed legs, the bursting sweater, the bright red lipstick slashed across her mouth. "How about it, Babe?" he asked again.

An Eye for An Eye

*The blind man said she was Angela.
And for fifty thousand bucks she
was ready to be anybody at all.*

BY PHILLIP WECK



"Sure," she said. "I don't mind, Honey."

"Over in the booth." He jerked his head toward the opposite wall. "It's my boss wants to meet you, not me."

She followed him to the booth, the next-to-the-last one, right behind Chino's. Chino would be sitting there with his ears glued to the partition, listening for every word, figuring up his take in advance.

"Siddown," said the short, stocky one.

So she sat down, across the table from his friend, and Shorty squeezed in beside her.

"Another peroxide, Al," Shorty said. "It might of been red; you can't tell. About the right size, the right age."

His friend was slender, almost skinny, with a somber black suit, a white shirt and a black tie, his face tanned and lined. Covering his eyes and dominating the entire upper half of his face was a pair of dark glasses. Black glasses, a black suit, a white shirt, that was the impression people carried away with them.

"How do you do, Miss?" he said in a toneless voice. His head was turned as if he were watching the bar and he didn't move it; he might have been speaking to someone else.

"What'll you have, Babe?" the stocky one asked.

She named the whiskey she

drank—always whiskey, neat, sipped slowly to make it last longer—and Shorty moved off to get it. No table service at this place.

The man called Al spoke again. "Angela?" he said, a question in his voice. "Is it you?"

"My name is Gladys, Mac," she said.

"You wouldn't lie to me, would you?"

"What would I lie to you for, Mac?" she asked flatly.

He was silent momentarily. Someone had put a nickel in the jukebox and a blatant blues singer was asking Henry to dance with her.

"You couldn't, you know," Al said. "Lie to me. You never could, Angela."

"My name's Gladys," she repeated.

He said, "Remember that spring night five years ago in the restaurant near San Leandro? Remember, Angela?"

"Look, Mac," she said, "I don't even know where the hell San Leandro is and my name's Gladys. It ain't Angela. You got me mixed up with some other girl."

"Remember the picnic on Memorial Day, when we went swimming?"

Shorty came back with the drinks then, the whiskey for her, beer for himself, water for Al.

"He's got me mixed up with some other girl," Gladys said. "It's all right with me, Shorty; I got all

day. Only tell him my name ain't Angela, will you?"

Shorty sat down. "How about it, Al?" he asked.

The other man made a slight, almost imperceptible motion of his head, still turned toward the bar.

"Okay, Babe," said Shorty. He took a wallet out of his trousers pocket. "This is for your trouble." He tossed a five-dollar bill on the table.

"I don't get it," said Gladys.

"Back on your little stool, Babe. We changed our minds, me and my boss."

She got to her feet, putting the five in her bra and picking up the whiskey glass. "Thanks," she said. "For nothing."

As she slid onto the stool she spoke aloud. "You meet all kinds."

"Yeah," answered Reds, the bartender. "You meet all kinds."

For a while she watched them in the mirror behind the bar. They sat there stolidly, patiently, speaking only an occasional word to each other. The man with the dark glasses kept his head turned toward the bar, not moving it once. Another girl came in, Daisy, short and dumpy and with black hair, and Shorty paid no attention to her. Then, about three o'clock, they left, the stocky one leading the way, the other walking hesitantly with his hand resting lightly on his friend's forearm.

A little after three, Gladys' first for the day came along, a middle-

aged man, short and prim, his big eyes eager and his hand shaking as he reached for his money and asked, "Would you like a drink, Gladys?"

She would. She always did. Somewhere along the line, every afternoon, she would have one too many, too, and this day was no different. By six, when Daisy told her, "Chino wants to see you," things were vague and kaleidoscopic and she made her way unsteadily along the street to the cheap, squalid little apartment where they lived.

Chino was waiting, his tiny eyes black and piercing, his sallow face streaked, his yellowed shirt stained with perspiration.

"Hand it over," he said without preamble.

She tossed the money on the bare kitchen table and he counted it—\$35. Twenty of it he put in his own pocket. Then he went to the pantry and brought out a short, heavy leather thong, the stock of what once had been a whip.

"It's all there, Chino!" she cried. "All of it! Honest!"

"How much did that blinky give you?" he demanded.

"Who?"

"That blinky—the blind man!"

Then she remembered. "Five," she said. "For nothing. That's all, Chino, honest!"

Reflectively, he slid the whip-stock up and down through his clenched fist, staring at her, the

deep lines of his cheeks etched even deeper. Then he said, "Sit down!"

She did, flopping on the studio couch, while he straddled a straight-backed chair, leaning over the back and watching her carefully as he spoke.

"The blinky's loaded," he said. "They have a big Caddy convertible, that short one driving, and they're putting up in a motel away down on River Road. I found that out this afternoon."

"All he gave me was five, Chino. Honest!"

"Look," Chino said, "I ain't interested in the lousy five or ten bucks you're holding out on me. This is big stuff."

"What do you mean?"

"They're loaded, see? They been in every joint over here and across the river looking for some babe named Angela. You heard 'em."

"So what?" she asked sharply.

"So you look like her. That's what one of 'em said, the same build, the same age. Besides, that blinky, how could he tell? He's blind."

"What if I do look like her?"

"So you go there tonight. You tell him you're Angela. He won't know it's been five years."

Gladys got shakily to her feet. "I won't do it, Chino! Besides, the other one'll remember me. He was talking to me today."

"He won't be there," Chino said. "That's the beauty of it, Gladys. Joe's going to pinch him—Joe

Macrelli, the deputy. He'll pick him up on some phony traffic charge and hold him a couple of hours while you go there, see?"

"I won't do it!" she said again. "Besides, what makes you think he'll give me any money?"

Chino swore, softly. "Tell him you're Angela and you're desperate and you need a thousand; he's carrying that much! And if it don't work, grab his wallet. Get him to take his coat off and sneak it; you ought to be able to do that."

She backed against the wall. "I won't do it, Chino! I won't! You can't make me!"

Deliberately he rose, one end of the stock grasped firmly in his fist, the other end pointed at her. He advanced slowly, on the balls of his feet, the way a cat walks, and he held the whip-stock as a dagger man holds his knife, hand down at his side but lower than a knife usually is held because he was crouching, his knees bent.

She flattened against the wall, the memory of pain and humiliation of other times clouding her eyes and her mind. "All right, Chino—"

He picked her up at ten, in Reds' bar, and got into the cab with her. "It's all set," he told her. "Joe pinched the short one half an hour ago; the blinky's alone in the motel cabin. Only you got to work fast. Joe says if the guy's smart

he'll be sprung in an hour."

They drove along the river to the road crossing closest to the motel. There Chino dismissed the cab, and they got out.

"It's the end cabin, the nearest one," he whispered to the girl. "I'll wait here."

"Come with me!" she said fiercely.

He had a hand on her forearm and he squeezed until she flinched from the pain. "Them blind ones, they can tell when somebody walks in. You're Angela, see, and you're from San Leandro and you got to go in there alone. And you know what happens if you mess this one up!"

So she limped on by herself, her body aching, her mind benumbed by whiskey. Up the side of the road to the gravel driveway leading to the end cabin, along that driveway to the door.

There, without hesitation, almost as if she were an automaton, she knocked on the door, and an answer sounded immediately.

"Come in," the voice said, a man's voice.

She opened the door. The cabin was completely dark. Vaguely, from the faint moonlight behind her, she could make out twin beds to her left, a closet to the right, and straight ahead, under the window on the far wall, a man sitting in a chair.

Sitting there in the darkness waiting for her.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"It's me, Al," she replied. "Angela. May I turn on the light?"

For a moment he hesitated, then he said, "Certainly. Turn it on and come over here."

She did, closing the door as she flicked the switch. In the sudden brightness she saw that he still had the glasses on, although his coat had been removed and his tie, and the whiteness of his shirt was glaring.

"Come over here," he said.

Slowly she approached, stopping directly in front of the chair.

"Is it really you, Angela?" he asked.

"Of course it is. It's me, Al. Can't you tell?"

He got to his feet and put his hands on her face, one palm against each cheek. "It is, isn't it?" he asked. "It's really you. After all this time."

"After five long years, Al," she said.

"I've been looking for you, Angela." His hands dropped to her throat, then her shoulders. "I heard what happened to you—what you turned into—and I've been trying to find you anyway."

The hands reached the low-cut V of her dress and the fingers deftly manipulated the few buttons there.

"You can't stop me now, Angela," he said. "Not after what you've become. It's not like it was five years ago, before the accident."

The dress slipped from her shoulders.

"I've been waiting for you five years, Angela," he said. His palms touched her throat, her arms, her abdomen.

And all the while she was staring into those unfathomable dark glasses.

A person telegraphs his motions and his plans with his eyes. A fighter watches another's eyes, not his fists or arms. A man facing a gun or a knife does the same thing; you can't tell from pistol muzzle or shining blade what will come next.

But when a man is blind, when he covers his sightless eyes with sightless, unrevealing dark glasses, what can you do?

She was staring into those glasses, trembling, sick at heart; she had no warning. The blow to the abdomen, delivered with his clenched fist and all the force he could command, came as a startling, sickening, thudding surprise.

It sent her reeling back a step and as the pain, a numbing, heavy ache, spread through her body she bent over and another blow caught her awkwardly on the forehead.

Then he was swarming over her, forcing her back, shoving her, pressing against her until she stumbled and fell as nausea surged up in her throat and her mind whirled and she fell on her back, he landing on top of her.

Desperately, frantically, she

squirmed and twisted, trying to wriggle free, trying to scratch his face, to kick him. But his weight was too much. He pressed her to the floor, his hands groping until one of them found her chin and shoved it up, sharply, and the other held one shoulder pinned to the floor. Then he scrambled to his knees, astride her.

"There!" he said. "There!"

He had one shin on each of her shoulders, her head firmly between his knees. She couldn't move her shoulders, she couldn't turn her head; except to thrash her legs around uselessly she was helpless.

"It isn't the money, Angela," he said, panting, hoarse. "It isn't the fifty thousand you took. And it isn't the kind of woman you turned into."

His hands found her temples, fingers outstretched.

"I knew you'd come to no good anyway," he said. "It isn't that, Angela, it isn't the money or the morals."

His thumbs spread slowly, surely, toward each other and she closed her eyes.

"It's my sight, Angela," he said. "You took it from me."

The thumbs closed together, over the bridge of her nose. Then slowly they separated.

"You were the one who was drunk, Angela," he said. "Not I. You were the one who insisted on driving. Not I. You took my sight from me, Angela. You stole it, and you're going to pay."

Slowly, inexorably, those thumbs pressed upon her eyeballs. A sharp, knife-like pain shot into her brain and she screamed. Just once, a cry of sheer terror.

Then, suddenly, miraculously, the pressure lessened. From a distance, dimly, she heard a voice crying, "Don't, Al! Don't! It's the wrong one! Al!"

The weight on her shoulders disappeared. She opened her eyes and the room whirled in front of her, blackness mixing with streaks of light, two thick, trousered legs wavering and bending in her contorted vision.

"They pulled a phony on us, Al!" the voice said. "It's one of the chippies we talked to this afternoon; they had me pinched and pulled a phony! Honest, Al!"

Then hands grasped at her shoulders and yanked her to a sitting position.

"Get out of here!" the voice commanded. "Quick!"

It was the short, stocky man, his face peering into hers, lifting her to her feet, turning her toward the door of the cabin.

"Get out of here!" he said again.

He led her to the entrance, supporting her as she tottered.

Outside he said, "How much do you usually get?"

Somewhere in the darkness, she knew, Chino was waiting and ready for her, the stock of the whip in his pocket.

"A thousand dollars," she said.

"A thousand! You cheap little chiseler! Here's a hundred!"

He handed her a bill and she took it and stumbled off, barely lifting her feet, barely able to make out the gravel driveway ahead of her.

At the edge of the road Chino was beside her, appearing noiselessly.

"How much did you get?" he asked.

Wordlessly she handed him the bill.

"A hundred!" he said. He cursed. "A lousy hundred! The guy's crazy. I saw the whole thing through the window! A stinking, lousy hundred!"

They trudged on toward the intersection.

"That only leaves you ten," he said. "Forty percent for me and I gotta give Joe Macrelli fifty."

She didn't reply. Ten dollars? What would ten dollars' worth of whiskey mean anyway? What had fifty thousand dollars worth of whiskey meant to her?

Maybe she should have let him blind her. Maybe then she wouldn't feel guilty— after all, it had been an accident. How many times had she told herself that it had been an accident; she hadn't been *that* drunk. It hadn't been her fault the car had overturned that night, she thought dully.

But it didn't make any difference now.

"Give me the ten," she said.

Madman

I liked my pop a lot. I didn't even stop liking him when I saw what he was doing in the back yard that night...

BY ROY CARROLL



AFTER SUPPER, I went down to the gate at the head of the cowpath and sat there on the top rail looking down the path to the dark stand of timber along the creek beyond the pasture, and even then, though I didn't know it, Uncle Jude's body was under the hay in the barn.

It had been a good day. In the morning I'd dug potatoes under the hot sun in the garden, and in the afternoon I'd taken a pole and line and gone down to the creek to fish for bullheads in the shaded holes along the bank. It was nice down there with the sun and shade in a

pattern on the bank and water, and I caught three bullheads about a foot long each, and later in the afternoon I went down the creek thirty yards or so beyond the riffles to the deep pool that was good for swimming and had a lazy dip all by myself. Afterward I dried in the sun and got back into my clothes, and it was like putting on silk. Clothes feel like that after a swim and drying in the sun, even jeans and a work shirt, sort of soft and rich — like silk.

I'm telling it this way because it was such a good day and was the last good day for a long time, and probably there won't ever be a day quite so good again. It was almost as if the day were doing its best for me to make up for the bad days to come, and it's funny, looking back, to be able to remember it so clearly, as if I knew it was the last good one and was sort of tuned up for it.

It was so pleasant down there at the creek that I stayed too long, and I knew when I started back for the house that I was going to be late for supper. I worried some about that, hurrying across the pasture and fields and up the cowpath as fast as I could, for I was hungry and didn't want to miss eating just because I was too late for grace. Pop was like that. He didn't believe in eating unblessed food himself, and he didn't believe in letting anyone else eat it at his table.

I was too late for grace, all right, just as I'd feared. Mom and Pop were at the table in the kitchen eat-

ing round steak and boiled potatoes and green peas, and Pop looked up from his plate at me when I came up across the back porch and inside. I expected him to tell me to get on to my room, and I stood there waiting for it, but he only said, "Sit down and eat your supper." This surprised me, but I didn't question it. I sat down quick and started to eat, and the food tasted good even if it was unblessed.

No one said anything all during supper, but that wasn't anything strange, because there never was much talking at table after grace, except once in a while when Charlie Turbo, the hired hand, was there and got something going. Charlie was part Cherokee Indian, and Indians aren't supposed to say much, but Charlie was an exception. He liked to talk and laugh and have a good time, and he got drunk in town every Saturday night. This was Saturday, and Charlie had already left for town, and that was why he wasn't there for supper.

When I'd finished eating, I asked to be excused, and Pop nodded his head without saying anything, and that's when I went down to the gate at the head of the cowpath. I'd got to thinking about Charlie Turbo at the table, and I kept on thinking about him for a while, and mostly I wondered why Pop didn't fire him. Charlie was a good worker, of course, and I guess that's why Pop kept him on. Usually, though, he wouldn't have anyone around who

didn't do right, and the way Pop looked at it, getting drunk wasn't doing right. Sometimes he'd quote scripture at Charlie and call him a sinner and tell him what was going to happen to him after he was dead, but Charlie didn't seem to worry much about being a sinner or what was going to happen as a result. He just laughed, the flash of his teeth clean and white across his dark face, and you could tell that he was going right ahead and get his bottle next Saturday night.

A lot of people thought Pop was a harsh man, and maybe he was, but he was always fair enough with me. He had his own ideas about right and wrong, and he was pretty set in them, I'll have to admit that, but I guess a man has to go along with his ideas, whatever they are. Not that I always saw things the same way. As a matter of fact, I was inclined to agree with Charlie Turbo about laughing and having a little fun, that there was no harm in it. Come to think of it, Pop and Charlie were something alike in some ways. They were both tall, lean men with a toughness in them like a hedge knot, but there was a grimness about Pop that Charlie didn't have, maybe because he was younger and hadn't come to it.

After a while, sitting there on the top rail of the fence, I quit thinking about Pop and Charlie and got to thinking about what a good day it had been, and that it wasn't very often you had a day that was good

right down to the end. It still wasn't completely dark, but it soon would be, and the stand of timber along the creek was just a black line against the sky. I could hear a lot of different sounds, and I began to try to separate them and tell what each one was, and there were the singing of cicadas, and the croaking of frogs along the creek, and the screeching of an owl, and the quick scurrying of a rabbit in the grass. There were the stamping of cows in the barn, and the hoarse grunting of pigs in their pen below the barn, and from down the road three-quarters of a mile the howling of Uncle Jude's hound. There were lots of other sounds, too, but they were all mixed up, and I couldn't get them apart, and I thought that it would be a pretty good thing to get so you could separate all the hundreds or thousands of sounds you heard and be able to tell exactly what each one was.

It got dark all of a sudden. One second I could still make out things in the dusk, and the next second they were all blotted out. It didn't get any cooler, though. If there was any breeze at all, it was high in the tree tops, and down along the ground it was still and sultry. I kept on sitting there in the darkness, sorry the day was ended because it had been a good day, and not wanting to go up to the house to bed because it would be hot in my room and hard to get to sleep. Pretty soon, I heard the back door bang and then the

sharp, measured striking of Pop's heavy shoes on the hard ground as he crossed the back yard and came through the barn and stopped a few steps behind me. I didn't turn around or say anything, and he didn't either, for a minute, but I could feel him there looking at me, and I could even see him in a way, without looking at him, as gaunt and ungiving as a dry season.

After a minute, he said, "Get to bed, boy."

I climbed down off the gate and said, "It'll be hot in my room."

He stepped forward and snarled his rough fingers in my hair and pulled my head back, but it wasn't done with any intent to hurt me. I could see, looking up, that he was staring down toward the creek, and I knew that he didn't even realize what he was doing.

"The breeze is from the west," he said. "What little there is, you'll get it through your window."

"All right," I said.

He kept on looking off through the darkness toward the creek. "Chores and church in the morning. You'll need your rest."

He let go of my hair, and I went through the barn and up across the yard to the house. Mom was still in the kitchen. She'd been mixing bread dough and had set it on top of the stove to rise. She turned and looked at me in the yellow light, and her face was drawn and tired under her skinned-back gray hair, but there was still in it, even after all the

long years and hard work, a kind of bone-beauty of structure that would never deteriorate like the rest of her. She must have been altogether beautiful when she was young, her hair and eyes bright and her skin fresh and tiredness not yet upon her like gray dust.

I'd heard that she'd grown grim and queer and old overnight and had taken to religion with ferocity when my sister Ruth died, but I don't know about that because my sister died of pneumonia before I was born. She was buried, my sister, in the family plot that was really no more than a lower corner of the pasture. There was a heavy wire fence around it to keep the cows out, and it was kept trimmed all the time, and in summer it was very pretty with its plain stones under the spreading branches of the big cottonwood that stood in a corner. My grandfather and grandmother were buried there a long time ago, and so Ruth was put there, too, instead of in the regular cemetery behind the church a couple of miles east toward the river. Mom did most of the work tending the plot. She went down at least twice a week during the time of year that the grass grew.

Now, in the yellow light, she stood by the stove with a flush of heat in her gray face. "Come here," she said.

I crossed over to her, and she put both hands on the sides of my head and tilted it back to look down into

my face. I was fifteen and getting pretty tall, but she still had to look down to see into my face. She just stood there for a minute, looking down that way, and then she said, "Get to bed now."

She didn't show affection for me very often, hardly ever, just acting most of the time as if I weren't even around, and to have her touch me and look at me like that sort of got me in the throat.

"Good-night, Mom," I said.

"Good-night. Say your prayers."

I went into my room and undressed, but I didn't say my prayers. Not that I wanted to be contrary. It was more that I didn't always have something to say. I lay down on top of the covers, and once in a while the breeze would stir up and come through the west window and touch me, but not often. Sweat seeped out of my pores and trickled down over my ribs onto the cover, and I was miserable.

After a while I began to think about how it would be outside, how much cooler, and I decided that I'd slip out the window, but I'd have to wait for Mom and Pop to go to bed first. I kept on lying there with the sweat seeping out of me, and a long time later the door opened, and I could see Pop standing there against the light behind him. He didn't say anything, and I didn't, either, and pretty soon he closed the door and went away. I made myself lie there for another half hour or so, though it seemed ten times that, and then I

got up and unfastened the screen and crawled outside.

I walked down toward the smoke house, skirting the open area of the back yard, and the air had quit moving entirely, and there was no moon up yet in the sky. Darkness seemed to press in from all sides, warm and sticky, but even so it was much better than it had been in the bedroom. I went on beyond the barn and looked back at it from the far side, and it was then that I saw the lantern moving inside and heard someone walking around.

I stopped and watched, wondering if Charlie Turbo had come back early from town. It wasn't like Charlie to give up his night with the bottle. He usually returned, after sleeping off his drunk, late Sunday afternoon. The rear door of the barn was open, and I could see the lantern, wick turned low, sitting on the ground in the cross aisle. I started toward it, feeling in my heart the kind of irrational dread that is caused even by commonplace things when they are distorted by night, but I'd only taken a few steps when a man moved into the small area of light inside the barn and bent down above the lantern. I had time to see, before the light went out, that the man was Pop. His long, gaunt body looked exaggerated and grotesque in the soft, red light.

I stayed where I was in the barnyard, watching and listening, and for some reason the dread inside me did not diminish, even though it was

only Pop in the barn, but it changed some, became less a dread for myself, for what might happen to me, than a dread of what Pop might be doing. I don't know why that was. He'd never given me any reason for thinking that way. He'd never in his life, so far as I knew, done a bad thing. I guess it was just being out there in the night that way, a kind of unexpectedness and stealth about it.

Then he came out of the barn and started slowly across the barnyard toward the gate to the cowpath. In his left hand he carried a spade, and on his right shoulder something heavy and cumbersome. I could tell it was heavy from the way his back bowed under it and from his slow, measured tread that was like a methodical shifting of braces against the weight bearing down. The gate to the cowpath had already been opened, and he went through into the path and disappeared in the darkness. I could hear his clumping footsteps on the trodden ground for almost a minute after he was gone from sight.

I peered into the darkness and listened, and I knew that the thing on his shoulder was a body, and I had a strange impression of sharpened senses that seemed to isolate and clarify all sound and feeling. Each grain of dust was identifiable under my bare feet. The air that had not been moving stirred on my skin. The sum of night sounds separated into its many parts.

It was a long time before I could move, and when I moved at last, it must have been in a kind of trance, because I was half way down the cowpath after Pop before I realized where I was. I wasn't afraid. Although he was a grim man, I was never afraid of Pop. In my own way, I always loved him for what he was in his way, and what I felt now was an awful kind of sorrow for what he must have done and for what he was now doing. I think I felt a passing sorrow for the good day, too, and for what it had come to in its last hours.

At the foot of the path I heard sounds in the field over to my left. I stood still and listened to the sounds, and they were the sounds of a spade biting into the earth and the dull impact of falling clods. Crawling between strands of barbed wire, I walked across the field toward the sounds. I didn't try to be quiet, and when I got close enough to see Pop through the darkness, he had stopped digging and was standing rigidly in a shallow excavation with the spade held frozen over a mound of earth at one side. The body was lying on the ground, and thin light came from somewhere, maybe the stars, to lie on the face of Uncle Jude, and it was a dead face with open, vacant eyes. I looked up from the face of Uncle Jude to the face of Pop, and his was dead, too, touched by the same thin light, and the eyes in his dead face were stones.

He didn't raise his voice or show

emotion in any way. "What are you doing here?" That was all he said.

"I couldn't sleep," I said, "so I climbed out through the window. I saw you come down here from the barn."

"You shouldn't have done that," he said. "You shouldn't have followed me."

He dropped the spade and stepped out of the grave. I backed away a step in a kind of reflex action, and he stopped, looking at me.

"Are you afraid?" he said. "Do you think I'd hurt you?"

I shook my head. "No. I'm not afraid." And it was the truth.

"That's good." He came over and took me by the hair as he had done earlier at the cowpath gate. "I wouldn't do you any harm, boy."

I stared up into his dull, stony eyes. The planes of his long face were like slabs of yellow clay in the thin light.

"You killed Uncle Jude," I said.

"Yes. I killed him. He was an evil man. An unbeliever. I was God's agent. God rose in a cloud of fire from a bush in the pasture and told me to do it."

I thought that he'd probably gone crazy from thinking about such things, like the men in old times who lived in caves and ate locusts. But it was true about Uncle Jude. Half true, I mean. He was an unbeliever, all right, but I didn't think he was an evil man. He and Pop were blood brothers, and they were remarkably alike, even physically,

and it used to seem strange to me that two men so alike could hold such opposite views, but after I'd thought about it a long time, it didn't seem strange at all. It was just that they were men made for extremes, and it had to be one or the other. Uncle Jude, being an atheist and not believing in God at all, was just as religious in a way as Pop was. He *made* a religion of it, I mean. He was a regular fanatic, and I guess what I'm trying to get at is, fanatics are pretty much the same, whether it's a matter of believing or not believing.

I didn't say anything, and Pop kept on looking off into the darkness toward the creek, his fingers snarled in my hair. Pretty soon, he said, "It was God's will. If you ever tell anyone what you've seen, you'll be thwarting God's will. You wouldn't want to do that, would you, boy? You wouldn't want to incite the wrath of God, would you?"

"I'm not afraid of you, and I'm not afraid of God," I said. "But I won't tell."

He was quiet again for a long time, and I thought at first that he was angry with me for my blasphemy, but then he gave my head a little shake by the hair and turned me loose. "Get back to bed," he said.

I turned and went back across the field and crawled through the barbed wire. I stood there in the darkness until I heard the sound of the spade again, and then I went back up to the house and through

the window into my room. It was still hot in there, and the sweat again seeped out of my body and ran down onto the cover, but now there was an independent coldness inside me that was something that came from sorrow and confusion and the memory of Pop's yellow face in the thin light of stars as he dug a grave for Uncle Jude in the field at the foot of the cowpath.

The next morning, after chores, we went to service, and I guess I'll not forget seeing Pop sit there on the hard bench during the sermon and hearing his voice raised in the hymns and repeating the Lord's prayer while all the time I was remembering the sound of the spade in the dark. Mom sat on the other side of Pop, and she never looked at him once, nor at me, and I wondered if she knew about what had happened, but I really knew that she did, all about it, and that she would never mention it, not to me or to anyone else, as long as she lived.

After service we all shook hands with the preacher at the door on the way out, just as we always did, and when we got home Sheriff Kimberly Beecher was waiting for us in front of the house. He was sitting on the front steps in the shade, and when we drove in from the road and on past him in the drive to the rear, he got up and came around the house to meet us with his hat in his hand. The hat wasn't exactly a cowboy hat, but kind of compromise.

It seems like all sheriffs wear hats like that. I suppose they think it's expected of them because of their job. Kimberly was tall and lean with a slow, slouching sort of walk and little squint eyes and thin sandy hair brushed straight back from his forehead over a narrow skull. In the sunlight, you could see his scalp through the hair and little flakes of dandruff on the scalp. He had a lazy smile and a lazy voice, and everyone said he was a great grafter and was getting rich from shake-downs in the county and from the way he handled things at the county jail, but he always got re-elected every two years just the same.

He smiled at Pop and said, "Morning, Reuben," and Pop nodded and said nothing, and Kimberly said, "Looks like another scorcher," and Pop nodded again and still said nothing, and then Kimberly said, "Just dropped by to ask if you'd seen Jude lately."

"Jude and I don't visit," Pop said. "Haven't for years. You know that."

"Sure. I know." Kimberly got out a thin plug of chewing tobacco and gnawed off a corner. Around it, he said, "Anyhow, the last I heard you didn't. I thought maybe things had changed since then."

"Nothing's changed. Nothing's likely to change. Jude's a damned hard-headed man."

He didn't mean it as profanity. He meant it literally. Knowing what I did, that Uncle Jude was dead, I didn't like to hear him say

it. Suddenly I felt a great pity for Uncle Jude, and I wished I really knew where he was at that second, if he was in hell, like Pop thought, or if he was nowhere at all except a few feet underground in the field where Pop had put him. Kimberly Beecher squinted at Pop and chewed his cud of tobacco and spat in the gray dust.

"I guess Jude's got his convictions," he said. "As for me, I never was one to blame a man for knowing his own mind. The point is, Jude's gone."

"Gone?"

"That's right. He left home early yesterday afternoon. Told his wife he might walk into town, but first he was going to stop off here on the way. She didn't worry when he wasn't back by bedtime last night. Just assumed he'd gone on to town and would be home in his own good time. She went to bed and to sleep. When he wasn't there this morning, she phoned me. She's right worried. She says Jude never stayed away all night before. I'm wondering if he stopped off here, like he said he might."

"I didn't see him. I was in the fields all yesterday afternoon." Pop turned his head toward Mom without turning any of his body. "Did he come to the house, Abbie?"

"No," Mom said.

"How about you boy? You see your Uncle Jude?"

"No," I said.

Pop shrugged and let his eyes

drop to the dark, wet spots Kimberly had made in the dust. You could tell he didn't like anyone spitting tobacco. "Jude must've changed his mind," he said. "Just as well. I don't want him on the place."

Kimberly made another wet spot in the dust. "Seems like a hard way for one brother to feel about another. None of my business, though. Unless, of course, something happens that makes it my business." He turned from the waist and looked down toward the barn. "Where's Charlie Turbo? Maybe I could just ask him if he happened to see Jude."

"Charlie's in town. He went in yesterday afternoon."

"Oh, sure. Saturday night. Charlie's night to get drunk. I should've remembered."

"Yes. You've had him in jail often enough."

"Oh, well." Kimberly laughed. "Charlie gets a little noisy sometimes. Never been any harm in him. Not yet." He spat in the dust again, the last time, and it seemed to me a kind of period. He put his wide-brimmed hat on. "I'll just run into town and see if I can hunt Charlie up. So-long, Reuben. Morning, Mrs. Taylor."

When he was gone, I went into the house and into my room and sat there until dinner time. We had a rule at home that everyone was to stay in his Sunday clothes until after dinner, so I didn't change, and the

stiff, hot clothes seemed to confine and increase the terrible sickness inside me. When I was called to table, it was fried chicken, just as usual, and we had grace and dinner as if nothing had happened, except that no one ate much, and after it was over, I put on my old clothes and went back down to the creek.

It wasn't like yesterday. It wasn't ever going to be like yesterday again. I sat on the creek bank and watched the little signs of life, and I wished that Uncle Jude was alive, too, but he wasn't, and nothing I could wish was ever going to make him so. I thought maybe I should run away, but I knew that I couldn't run from what was in me, and, besides, I didn't hate Pop, and I didn't fear him. I only felt a kind of grief for him like I'd never felt before.

At dusk I went back up to the house and around to the front porch and sat on the steps. Mom and Pop were up on the porch in their rockers. During warm weather they always sat on the front porch in their rockers Sunday evenings. I sat there on the steps and listened to Pop's rocker going back and forth, one sound back and a slightly different sound forward, the alternating, rhythmic sounds of his rocking, and it seemed that something was missing, something gone that should have been there, but I didn't have time to think about it, because a car came down the road and turned in. Kimberly Beecher got out in the

drive and came over to the steps.

"Evening, Reuben," he said. "Evening, Mrs. Taylor."

Pop said, "Evening," and kept on rocking, and Kimberly said, "Dropped back to tell you Charlie Turbo's not in town. He hitched a ride out yesterday afternoon. Looks queer. I'm sending out word to have him picked up."

"No," Pop said. "Let Charlie alone. He's just going to see his sister. He does that every so often. I'll tell you where Jude is."

He said it so quietly, right on the end of the part about Charlie, that I didn't grasp for a moment what he'd said. Kimberly got it right away, though. He stood very still for a few seconds without speaking, and then he said, "If you know where Jude is, why didn't you tell me this morning?"

"This morning I had a reason to hold my tongue. Now I haven't got any reason."

"All right, Reuben," Kimberly said. "Where's Jude?"

"Buried in the field east of the cowpath. I dug the grave and put him there myself."

"You confessing murder?"

Pop didn't answer directly. He was like that. He had his own way of coming to a thing, and he came his own way. After a while, I could hear the soft sigh of his breath in the darkness, and there was a great loneliness in it. He said, "People thought I hated Jude. I didn't. He was my blood brother, and the drive

was strong in me to be brotherly, but I couldn't. Because of Abbie here. It was Abbie who hated him. There was a craziness in her about him that only got stronger with passing years. It started when our girl Ruth died. The craziness did. The girl meant that much to Abbie, you see. She thought only of dying herself to regain the girl, and it was nothing but fear that God would prevent the regaining as punishment that kept her from hurrying her death by her own hand. Jude didn't believe in anything past the grave. He told Abbie that a long time ago, and she kept thinking about it. It grew and grew and became a terrible thing inside her. It was as if she feared the power of Jude's thought, that just by living and thinking a thing long enough he might make it so. I told Jude never to come here, and for years he didn't, but yesterday he did. He came while I was in the fields, and Abbie had just come up from the girl's grave, the craziness fresh and strong in her from the girl's grave. She told Jude to go away, and it hurt him, I guess, made him want to hurt back. He said something about the sin of keeping brothers apart because of a dead girl no one would ever see again, and there was Abbie with the craziness in her and a meat knife in her hand. . . . Jude shouldn't have come here. I told him not to come."

Kimberly said, "I'll come back for Jude in the morning, Reuben."

Pop said. "No hurry now."

Kimberly went back to his car and drove away, and after his lights had vanished down the road, Pop said, "It was a lie I told you, boy, that God commanded Jude's death. That was the devil's work, and I tried to undo it, but the devil's work will not be undone. It was the devil in your mother's mind, too, and she couldn't help it, and neither could I. Once she was bright and full of laughter, and she loved me, common dirt farmer that I was, but after the girl's death she loved no one on earth. Not me. Not you. You were gotten foolishly out of love, and she had none for you. I've thought about these things in all the years that we sat rocking together on this porch, and I guess it made a harsher man of me. It was a notion of mine to sit here with her one more time. This last time."

Standing and turning, I looked up across the porch to where Mom sat in her rocker with her hands lying on the arms and her head back and her eyes staring up at an angle under the porch roof to the stars.

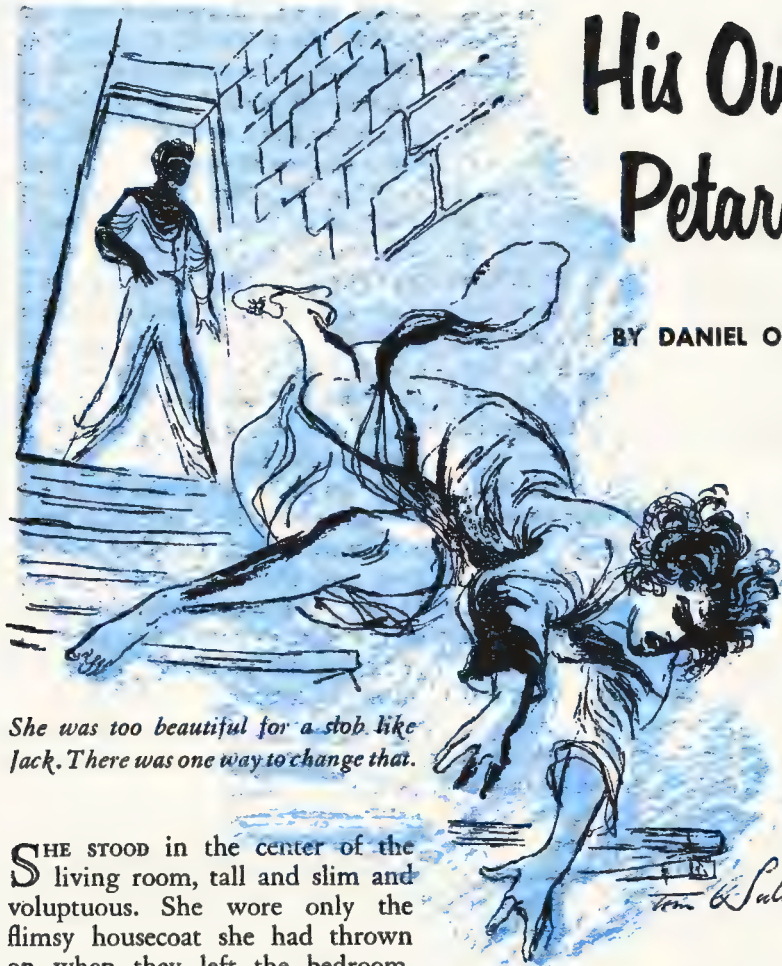
"Natural," Pop said. "She called death to this house, and I guess he just stopped over a day for her."

Then I knew what it was I had missed in the evening. There had been the sound of only one rocker.



His Own Petard

BY DANIEL O'SHEA



She was too beautiful for a stob like Jack. There was one way to change that.

SHE STOOD in the center of the living room, tall and slim and voluptuous. She wore only the flimsy housecoat she had thrown on when they left the bedroom. Her red hair was still mussed; her lipstick had been completely worn off.

"Do you have to go?" she pouted. Johnson finished knotting his tie before the mirror. "Yes. Jack'll be home any minute." He was a tall, handsome man. His blond hair was

thick and wavy and his eyes were a weak, flat blue.

She came up beside him and ran her hand seductively across the back of his shoulders. "No he won't. He said he'd be working through to midnight again. He really has to work—not like you."

She sighed good humoredly. "Poor Jack."

He knotted his tie, reached for his jacket. "No matter. I have to go anyway. Ann is expecting me."

She sat down sulkily on the couch. "No she isn't. You phoned her from here, remember? You said you wouldn't be home till twelve."

"Well, no matter," he said, stopping and kissing her forehead. "I have to leave now, Vera. I have some things to do at home." He started for the door.

"Tom?"

He paused and turned. She rose from the couch and approached him. "Jack will be working again Thursday night. Will I see you then?"

"What do you think?" He kissed her passionately, then he kissed her again, and again. When it all began to start once more, he turned abruptly and left.

It was a hot night, a summer night in a Long Island suburb. The stars were out, but they were hazed with humidity, as was the moon. Johnson removed his jacket and set a moderate pace for the five-block walk to his home. Along the way, cigars and cigarettes glowed from darkened porches like fireflies. Dogs barked across unseen backyards. Here and there, a television set glowed from a porch or through a living room window.

He recalled her standing in the

doorway, her red hair loose, the housecoat fallen open. God, she was beautiful! Too beautiful for a slob like Jack. Just as he was—well, not beautiful, but a little too much man for a woman like Ann.

Tonight, though, it would all be changed. Or, at least, he would begin the change. He had thought about it many times, but tonight he would do it.

He guessed he had begun thinking about it that first night with Vera. The night she and Jack and Ann and he had been at the country club together. He had gone out to the parking lot to get something of Ann's from the car. Vera had said she was going to the ladies' room and had instead followed him out there. When he had found whatever it was in the glove compartment, he had said, "Okay, we can go back now, Vera."

From where she had seated herself in the back, with half-closed mockingly suggestive eyes, she had said, "Do we *have* to go back right now?"

Yes — tonight he would begin, with Ann. That loose step at the top of the cellar stairs. What could be more natural? And then later, after a decent interval, he would find a way for old Jack. Jack Bowden, his best friend, his old army buddy. Maybe a car accident of some sort. . . .

It was too bad it had to be this way. Divorce would be so much nicer. But then why would he want

to be nice? They were the nice people, Jack and Ann. They were the people who believed in things, who loved, not just lusted, who were faithful and loyal to their mates and who always tried to do the right thing. The good people. Well, to hell with them.

This was what they would get for their goodness. The goddam weak fools!

He had been one of the good people once, himself. He had believed. Then he found out what you got for it. All the time he was in the army he had saved his money and sent it to the girl he had become engaged to in high school. It was supposed to be their nest egg for after the war. Then one day, just after Anzio, he got a letter from her telling him that she was going to have the baby of some 4Fer who had stayed home, and that she had married him. And she knew he wouldn't mind that they had used his money, his nest egg, to furnish their new home. . .

After that, he had not bothered to concern himself with ethics, or conscience, or goodness, ever again. But this was the first time since then he had ever had any reason to be really bad. That is, in a big way, a dangerously big way. This was the first time he had ever had reason to commit murder.

But even if he tried to give Ann and Jack a break, it wouldn't work. They were just too good. Suggest

divorce to them and they'd want to try to "work things out," and the whole business would turn into a big mess. Too, with divorce there wouldn't be the insurance money. And that he and Vera would need to start their new life, the life that they both deserved. What a team they would make together! And with the start the insurance money would give them. . .

He started to feel a twinge of pity for Ann and Jack, then he laughed, or rather, snarled it away. The poor, trusting, good fools!

The lights were on downstairs when he reached home, but Ann wasn't waiting for him in the living room as was usual. "Ann!" he shouted.

He heard footsteps upstairs and a door opening. "Tom? I'll be right down." He went into the kitchen, poured himself a glass of beer, and waited.

A few minutes later, Ann appeared in the doorway. She wore a housecoat, but not at all like the sleek, pale green one Vera had worn. Ann's was a gaudy thing of printed flowers, and it was rumpled and a poor fit. Her body within it was already beginning to sag into comfortable wifeliness at twenty-eight. Her hair was mussed, too, but where Vera's mussed hair had added to her sensuous desirability, Ann's was only stringy and mussed. Her healthy, pleasant face was flushed. She seemed nervous.

"I—I didn't think you'd be home till after twelve. I was just lying down for a while."

"It was too hot to go on working," Johnson replied gruffly. "I decided to quit early." God, she looked drab! The contrast between her and Vera was just too much for a man. The poor, drab Jacks and Anns all over the world who thought that trying to be good and just and simple was the only important aim in life. . .

"I'll put some coffee on," she said, moving toward the stove.

"No!" he said sharply. He wanted to get it over with as quickly as possible, before he lost his nerve. But then he realized how good it would look to the police later. She had been in the midst of making coffee. How homely, how natural! "Well, all right," he added. "Go ahead and make some."

He watched her fill the bottom of the Silex with six measuring cups of water and put it on to boil. Then she dipped six tablespoons of coffee into the top and set it in the stand to wait on the water.

Now Johnson began to feel somewhat reluctant about what he had to do—but he knew that now was the time. Before the water boiled.

How perfect it would look. . . The bottom of the coffeemaker glowing red, its water boiled away to a dry, stinging odor, unnoticed by the grief-stricken husband. The top, with its six tablespoons of fresh coffee, still in the stand. The

shaken husband castigating himself for not having fixed that top step long ago. She had been going down to the food locker to get more coffee for the morning. . . .

He would be sure to wet that remaining in this can and throw it in the garbage. . .

He walked over to the head of the cellar stairs, his knees shaking ever so slightly. He paused and gained enough control of his voice to make it sound casual. "What's that big box at the foot of the stairs, Ann? I've never seen it before."

"What box?" she said, coming across the kitchen to join him.

Her stupid, trusting, loving face! Like a goddam dog he thought. "Right there at the foot of the stairs."

She stepped in front of him, groping absently for the light switch, peering downward. She started to turn her head. "I don't see any—"

Then she felt his hands on her and she saw what was in his eyes. She screamed as she hurtled grotesquely down the steep stairway.

That scream had probably carried over the whole neighborhood, but that was all right. She would naturally scream when she felt the step give way.

He hurried down to where she lay sprawled on the concrete floor, her housecoat flung open and upward to cover her head. He hadn't put the cellar light on, but the light

shining down from the kitchen was sufficient to see her face when he pulled the garment away from it. She was still breathing.

Well, he would fix that! He lay his shin lightly across the back of her shoulders. Just enough to hold them. . . . No sense in leaving any bruises that might not have come from the fall. He cupped his left hand under the side of her jaw that was toward the floor and his right over the back of her head at the top. Then, in one sharp movement, he jerked the left hand upward and shoved downward with the right, holding her body steady with his shin. His efforts were rewarded with a dull snap somewhere at the back of her neck.

He paused a moment and then lifted her eyelid to check for further signs of life. But he couldn't see the eye very clearly, and he realized that, for several moments, something at the head of the stairs had obstructed his light from the kitchen.

Something? . . . Someone! . . .

He turned his eyes, wide with terror, slowly upward. A man stood there, nude except for a pair of blue serge, cuffless trousers, on which a stenciled yellow number showed under the belt. A .38 police service revolver was in his right hand.

"Jack—!" He swallowed with great effort. "You saw?"

"Yes, I saw what you did. Come on up outa there, Tom."

Johnson mounted the stairs like a sleepwalker, his arms hanging stiffly at his side. His staring eyes held on the figure above him. His mind groped confusedly for an explanation of Jack Bowden's presence here, his state of undress. . . . No, that was impossible!

When he reached the head of the stairs, the other man waved the gun muzzle toward the front of the house, saying, "Into the living room."

Johnson walked down the narrow hall, still moving like a sleepwalker. "B—But," he said to the footsteps behind him, "Vera said you were on special duty tonight."

Bowden's voice was matter of fact. "That's what I always told her when I came over here. It useta be only when I was off in the daytime, until you obligingly started staying out nights."

They had reached the living room and Johnson turned around, sputtering. "Y—You mean, you and Ann—"

"That's right—since April," Jack Bowden interrupted. "Now sit down over there where I can watch you while I phone." He again gestured with the gun muzzle.

Johnson slumped into the chair and his glazed eyes stared at the floor before him. Since April? No wonder there were no questions that night at the country club. They had probably gone off themselves. . . . And no wonder it had been so easy all these nights since!

He heard the phone dial spin once, and then Bowden's voice: "Operator, gimme the police." A pause. "Yes, it is." Another pause. "Let's see—Holles five-three-five-three-five." A longer pause. "Hello, Sarge. Patrolman Bowden, Midtown Traffic, off duty. I've just apprehended a murderer in your precinct. . . ."

Johnson didn't hear any more, because he was again giving forth snarling laughter. But this time it was not directed toward Jack and Ann as it had been a little while before. This time it was directed toward Tom Johnson, toward himself. For he realized that he had been the sucker, he had been the sap. He had been the believing, trusting slob. He had believed in Jack and Ann. He had trusted

them to be good, stupid, faithful, simple, loyal, loving slobs. . . .

His laughter rippled upward maniacally and his breathing became difficult.

He had depended on them for the goodness, the stupid, blind goodness that would make his own clever evil successful! What a trusting, believing, stupid, simple slob he had been! "Haha, haha, haha. . . ."

What was it the French said? Hoist by his own petard? . . . "Haha, haha, haha. . . ."

The neighbors gathered outside heard the hysterical, gasping laughter continue for a full and long six minutes, before it was drowned out by the approach of the first police sirens from the local precinct.



HENDERSON THREW the bottle hard at the wall. It broke clean at the neck and fell in two pieces, leaving a faint splatter of bourbon on the pink wallpaper.

Pink.

The only real estate office in the whole damn world, maybe, with pink wallpaper. He must have been nuts to let Julie talk

Henderson was going to kill his wife's lover. Obviously, his wife had to talk him out of it...

.38

BY

JOE GRENZEBACK

him into it. Pink!

He yanked at the drawer of his desk, trying to think if he had another fifth. Instead, he saw the edge of metal, all but hidden by a mess of unpaid bills. He pushed the bills away and looked down at the Colt .38 that lay in the bottom of the drawer.

Another of Julie's bright ideas.



He picked it up and turned it slowly in his hand. Julie had wanted the gun for lonely nights, the nights he worked late. It was a lousy idea, and the first chance he got he had smuggled the pistol out of the house and tucked it away in the desk drawer. And Julie hadn't even missed it. Julie had found something better for lonely nights.

Go home, he thought. Go home and shoot the bastard.

He put his hand back into the drawer and wiggled his fingers under the bills until he found the magazine that went with the Colt. It was full. He jammed it into the butt of the pistol, worked the slide, and heard the top cartridge click into the chamber. He dropped the pistol into his coat pocket.

Shoot the bastard.

It was so wonderfully simple. He needed a drink to celebrate.

He went down the street to Ed's place and sat against the wall at the end of the bar.

Ed put the drink in front of him, watched it go down, and poured him another. "You tying one on?"

"Rinsing my mouth," said Henderson.

Ed shook his big head glumly. "Hate to see it, Mr. Henderson. You go home like that, you won't be in for a month. Moderation, you know? It says about that in the Bible."

"Thou shalt not kill," said Henderson very solemnly.

"Sure," said the big man. "That too."

"Only not tonight," Henderson told him. "Tonight I'm going to kill a man."

"That so?"

"Shoot the bastard."

"Sure." Ed turned away and put the bottle on the shelf behind the bar. "Go on home," he said gently. "Get a good night's sleep."

"You think I'm kidding?"

Ed shrugged. "Maybe somebody'll talk you out of it," he said. "You go on home now."

Henderson paid for the drinks and went outside. The streetlights were blurred and it took a while to find the bus stop. He waited and thought about Ed, and a hard laughter welled up inside of him.

It'll be in the newspaper, he thought. Wait till he sees the paper.

He took the .38 out of his pocket and looked at it. The streetlight put glints of light along the barrel, and he remembered the glints in Julie's hair, the way it looked by moonlight. Beautiful.

A bus stopped to let him on. He shifted the .38 to his left hand and searched with his right for the fare.

The driver grinned and nodded towards the pistol. "Going hunting?"

Henderson dropped the coins into the fare-box and put the gun back into his pocket. "No," he said. "I'm going to kill a man."

The driver's grin broadened as he joked, "In-laws?"

"No," said Henderson. He moved down the aisle to an empty seat, and he could see the driver watching him in the wide mirror at the front of the bus. He was still grinning.

Joke, thought Henderson. *In-laws*.

The first time, the motel, the man had been Julie's brother. It came back that way over lunch, and he couldn't even remember who it was that had told him. Julie's brother and, later, Julie's cousin. But the same man.

Blonde?

He slid his hand into his pocket and touched the smooth, cold metal of the .38. Blonde or dark didn't matter. Julie's relatives, the real ones, were dead. And this one would be. *Little Orphan Julie*.

He laughed softly aloud.

The bus let him off at the corner, and walking took away the feel of laughter. He took the pistol into his hand, and a kind of numbness settled over his mind. He could feel it seeping into his muscles as he turned in at the white picket gate and walked up to the front door.

He stood for a moment, noting the strange car at the curb and the closed window blinds. He watched his hand put the key in the lock, and he was not sure, at first, that it was his hand. It might have been wax.

The door opened, and he closed it behind him deliberately. There

was no other sound. He walked slowly to the living room.

Dimly, from the back of the house, he heard Julie laugh. He followed the sound mechanically. His hand was damp under the pistol-grip, and his throat was dry. He wanted a drink badly.

It seemed a long time before they saw him; longer still before anyone moved. The man was blonde, all right; tall and unbuttoned like a badly dressed scarecrow. He moved abruptly away from the bed and put his back against the wall. His face was red and distorted.

"Sorry," said Henderson.

He raised the pistol slowly.

Julie said, "Ben!" She said it sharply, without fear, as if he were a ten-year-old with one hand in the cookie jar. She got up, then, her red hair wild about her face, and came a few steps towards him. "Are you drunk?"

"I don't think so."

"Then you're out of your mind."

She walked past him deliberately and got her housecoat from the chair near the door. "I thought you were working."

"Obviously."

She frowned a little. "We can straighten it out, can't we? It's not the end of the world." She belted in the housecoat and nodded at the pistol. "Put it away, Ben. Don't be an ass."

"No," said Henderson. He smiled at the blonde man and lev-

cled the .38. "I'm going to shoot the bastard."

The man's face lost its color and his eyes bulged. "I—don't! I—"

"Relax," said Julie, "I can handle him."

The words took away some of the numbness. Henderson looked at her, and her face was slightly out of focus. "Yes," he said quietly. "You always could."

"Then put that silly thing away." She stopped in front of him, her hands on her hips. A tight smile curled her lips, and the light from the hall put glints in the red hair.

"You're a damn fool, Ben. You won't shoot him. You won't..."

"No," said Henderson, and he suddenly wondered why he had ever thought that he would. "It was a damn silly notion," he said. "Why should I shoot him?"

The gun jerked in his hand, and he heard the report, far off. Julie opened her mouth, and a kind of wonder showed in her eyes. She fell heavily at his feet.

"Ed was right," said Henderson. He smiled vaguely at the strange and terrified man across the room. "She talked me out of it."





Mulvaney was a good cop, who had to follow his hunches. Even when they told him his son was a killer.

Hunch

BY HELEN NIELSEN

TIM MULVANEY was a family man. You could see that just by looking at him. He was big and square with a frank Irish face and big feet that gave him trouble now and then from the years he'd spent pounding a beat. That had been in the old days before they gave him a sergeant's rating and a transfer into Homicide, plainclothes division. Mulvaney had kind of hated that because the kids always got a kick out

of seeing their father in uniform; but they were growing up now and didn't think about such things any more. It sometimes seemed to Mulvaney that the kids didn't think of anything — especially their father. It was peculiar how fathers had a way of growing stupid in direct proportion to their offspring growing up.

But Mulvaney wasn't stupid. He wasn't a genius, or anything like that, but he was a good cop who knew his job, and sometimes a cop got a feeling about a case. Nothing he could put his finger on, exactly. Just a feeling.

I.

It wasn't a nice murder. Nothing neat or quick about it — just ugly death, naked and cruel. It was the sort of crime that made Mulvaney want to go off in the bushes and be sick, even after twenty years on the force, because she was such a kid and she'd fought so hard. They found the body about three o'clock in the afternoon. It was almost dark before Mulvaney got home.

Art Simpson, next door, was out in front watering a lawn that looked ready for planting rice. He must have been at it for hours just so he could catch Mulvaney in the driveway.

"Saw your name in the paper, Jim," he called out. "Terrible thing! Any chance of you fellows catching the killer this time?"

Simpson was a good man to have

for a neighbor unless you were one of the taxpayer's hired hands on the dirtiest job in the world. The indignant taxpayer who raged over every new headline crime and then voted down a budget increase for the police department while awaiting the next edition.

"We're working on it," Mulvaney muttered.

"Expect an arrest within twenty-four hours, I suppose." Simpson's grin was a leer in the fading light. "Let's see now, how many murders like this have we had lately — three? — four?"

"Too many!" Mulvaney answered. "So far as I'm concerned, the first one was too many. I don't like this any more than you do, Art. I've got kids, too."

Something of the horror he'd picked up at the scene of the crime must have crept into Mulvaney's voice, because Simpson turned grave. This was a mistake. A man like Art Simpson was more natural making the bright, senseless chatter that made him a first-class calendar peddler — which was, of course, no way to think of a man who worked as hard for his money as anyone, but tonight Mulvaney wasn't in a charitable mood.

"I know what you mean," Simpson said grimly. "It's these crazy times we're living in. Nothing's sacred any more. Why, my paper says they think it was just a kid who did this thing!"

A skinny-legged kid in blue jeans.

Mulvaney had gotten the story himself from the tow truck driver at the crossings service station. *A skinny-legged kid who'd come running out of the bushes, been pinned for an instant in the lights of the truck, and then driven off in an old tan coupe that had been parked on the shoulder.*

"... I tell you, Jim, I lay down the law to Art Junior! Thank God I don't have a beautiful young daughter like your Jean to worry about!"

Mulvaney was only half listening, but he did catch that last sentence. Later it seemed that this was the beginning of the trouble, although beginnings were sometimes as hard to spot as a pickpocket at a dollar-day sale. At least, it did nothing to mellow the mood Mulvaney brought home with him.

2.

Madge was in the kitchen, of course. In the nineteen years of their marriage Mulvaney could hardly remember a night he hadn't come home and found Madge in the kitchen. If it was early she'd be preparing supper — fried potatoes, inevitably. Madge didn't seem to know anything else could be done with a potato. If it was late she'd be at something else — a cake for the church bake sale or a snack for Jean's friends on any rare occasion when Jean spent an evening at home. Tonight she was frying chicken in a deep iron skillet. From

the doorway she made quite a domestic picture. Her slip was hanging — Madge always had trouble with slips. Her stocking seams were crooked and a split was starting at one seam of her cotton dress where there wasn't enough dress and a little too much hip. Mulvaney could remember when Madge didn't have hips — well, no more than necessary.

He walked over and gave her a dutiful peck on one hot cheek.

"Watch out for the grease," she said. "It spatters."

It wasn't much of a greeting, but Mulvaney was no Romeo. The chicken, however, intrigued him. It was too late for Madge to be fixing supper, and he'd eaten downtown.

"What's it for this time?" he asked. "The church again?"

Madge smiled, and when she smiled he almost caught a glimpse of the girl he'd married.

"It's for Kenny," she said brightly. "He's going on a week-end outing with some friends tomorrow. I thought it would be nice to fry them up some chickens."

Now this was a small thing for Madge to say, and nothing, surely, to start an argument. But Mulvaney had been talking to Art Simpson and the thing he'd said was still on his mind.

"Friends?" he echoed. "What kind of friends?"

"Why," Madge answered, "just some of the neighborhood boys, I guess."

"You *guess!* Do you mean to tell me that you've given our son permission to go off for the week-end without even knowing the company he's keeping?"

It was all wrong, right from the beginning. For all he knew it was just a neighborhood boy who had left that body in the bushes. But how was Madge to know about that? The story was only spread all over the front pages. It wasn't written in her cook book.

"And how are the boys going on this trip?" he demanded.

"One of the boys has a car," Madge said.

"A hot rod?"

"Why, no. I don't think so —"

"And how old is the boy who's driving?"

It may have been coincidence that Madge chose that instant to take the lid off the skillet of sputtering chicken, but Mulvaney didn't think so. She knew what he was building up to. Time and again she'd heard him lecture Kenny: "Eighteen is old enough for a boy to have his own car — not sixteen and a half! If you'd seen some of the accidents I've seen —" But Madge took the lid off the chicken just when he was warming up to the point of this questioning and that didn't set well with Mulvaney.

And then the front door bell started ringing as if somebody's finger was stuck on the button, and bedlam broke loose in the hall.

"I'll get it, I'll get it!" Jean cried

from the stairway, and then Kenny, who must have been close enough to hear every word of what had been going on in the kitchen and was laying low out of self-preservation, bellowed a defiant:

"Aw, it's only Eddie again!"

Mulvaney moved over to the doorway where he could observe that stampede to the front door.

"Who's Eddie?" he asked.

"Oh, Jim —" Madge put the lid back on the skillet and gave him one of those not-that-again looks. "You know Eddie. He calls for Jean nearly every night."

Every night. This was just the sort of thing Mulvaney had been stewing about. Tonight it must be a square dance the kids were going to because Jean was all cotton ruffles and ribbons, and the sight of her, so much like Madge had been at eighteen, brought a lump to his throat. Both of the kids took after their mother — fair skin, blonde hair. Good-looking kids. Then Kenny opened the front door and in stepped Eddie, scrubbed and combed as if he'd just stepped straight from a shower into freshly laundered shirt and jeans.

A skinny-legged kid in blue jeans.

It was then that it really began, this strange feeling of Mulvaney's. Suddenly he was scared. More scared than he'd ever been in his life. It made no sense, this fear. No more sense than the body of that girl they'd found in the bushes this afternoon. Two nights ago she'd been as young and alive as Jean. It

was like Simpson said. Nothing was sacred any more . . .

"Jean — wait! I want a word with you!"

Even as he spoke Mulvaney knew what was going to happen. He'd say too much. He'd lay on the heavy father routine and demand to know why she couldn't spend an evening at home for a change, and then he'd shout that it was about time somebody exerted parental authority around here. He'd go right on shouting, even when he wanted to stop, until the skinny legs had fled from the doorway and Jean was sobbing her way up the stairs. And then he'd be left alone with Madge and all the worry in her eyes.

"Jim, what is it? What's wrong?"

Mulvaney couldn't answer. He didn't know.

"Why don't you ask for a few days off, Jim? Why don't you call the lieutenant right now? Maybe you could go up to the lake with Kenny tomorrow."

"Forget it," Mulvaney muttered. "I'm going out for a beer."

3.

It was cooler outside. Simpson's water-soaked lawn had contributed that much. It was cooler and quieter and Mulvaney could think as he walked. There was no use trying to explain anything to Madge. Madge lived between her kitchen, which was light and sunshine, and her church, which was sunshine and

light. She couldn't understand about the jungle outside. And it was a jungle. Twenty years in a jungle could make anyone jumpy; but that wasn't a good enough reason for what had happened when he saw Eddie Kovack standing in the doorway. There had been other crimes like this one — hundreds of them. Why was this one different? Why did he have a sinking feeling as if he were walking at the edge of a precipice?

"Sergeant Mulvaney? Haven't you had enough exercise for one day?"

Mulvaney stopped walking. It was fully dark now, but he could make out the shadow of a woman who had just stepped down from the porch of her bungalow to turn off the sprinkling system. Her figure might have been that of a well developed teen-ager; but her voice was one of maturity and culture. And intelligence, Mulvaney added mentally. An intelligent woman was hard to find.

"I was just going up to the corner for a beer," he said.

"And I was just going inside for the same thing. Why don't you join me . . . or perhaps you aren't in the mood for talking shop tonight. I warn you, that's why I'm asking you in."

Roberta Gibbons was a writer. Well, not exactly. Actually she was a teacher at the high school — that's where Mulvaney had met her when he delivered a lecture on juvenile

delinquency; but Roberta Gibbons was also trying to become a writer and that's what she meant about talking shop. And then suddenly Mulvaney knew that this was what he needed even more than the beer — a chance to talk out his trouble in the company of a woman who wouldn't think he was over-wrought and needed a rest just because he worried about his kids in a world gone crazy.

"Maternal coddling," she'd once remarked, "is the greatest single cause of all juvenile problems. Psychiatrists tell us . . ."

A very intelligent woman. And so Mulvaney followed Roberta Gibbons up the walk, marvelling at how a woman who led such a busy life could always manage to look neat and stylish. No sagging slips, no split hip seams, and her stocking seams straight all the way down her legs. But the important thing, of course, was her mind. She'd be bound to understand his reactions tonight. One pair of skinny legs in blue jeans was the same as any other. How could any parent be sure?

And sometimes a cop got a feeling about a case. *Kovack. Eddie Kovack.* Mulvaney filed the name on the top of his mind . . .

4.

First thing in the morning, Mulvaney pulled his car into a service station he never patronized and

didn't need to now. It was one of those long-established places with so much business there was no need for plate glass and chrome or a corps of uniformed attendants. The sign on the canopy read *Anton Kovack—Super Service* and a middle-aged man in oil-stained coveralls was in the office going over the previous day's receipts. He looked up, his face reminiscent of Eddie's, when Mulvaney spoke from the doorway.

"I'm looking for Eddie. Is he around?"

He got a long, questioning stare for his trouble and then:

"What do you want with him?"

"I just want to ask a few questions."

"Questions?" Kovack came around the side of the desk so he could get a better look at Mulvaney. "You're a cop," he said. "You look like a top. What do you want with Eddie?"

Mulvaney hadn't counted on opposition so soon. What did he want with Eddie, anyway? It was still nothing but a hunch — a kind of uneasy feeling, as if a bill he'd forgotten was about to come due. And then, while he was still trying to think of an answer for the elder Kovack, a noise from the back of the lot caught his attention. Back by the grease pit was an open front garage, and in it he could see Eddie running an electric polisher over what was an obviously new paint job on an obviously ancient coupe.

. . . *an old tan coupe.* Suddenly Mulvaney's hunch had wings.

Eddie didn't hear his approach with the polisher going.

"Your car, Eddie?"

Mulvaney said it loud. The kid spun about and shut off the electric motor. He hadn't forgotten last night. His face was flushed with anger.

"Who wants to know?" he challenged.

Mulvaney yanked open the trunk lid. As he hoped, the new paint hadn't gone this far. The under side of the lid was still the original color — what there was of it. It was a kind of dirt color. A kind of dirty tan. Then he slammed down the lid and looked inside the car. It was a clean job with new seat covers and a new mat on the floor.

"Fixing it all up, Eddie?" he said. "I guess it's easier to get the girls to ride in it that way."

"I'm fixing it up because I want it fixed up!" Eddie retorted. "There's no law against that!"

There was a law, a big law, against what Mulvaney was thinking; but he didn't have a chance to get it off his mind before Papa Kovack, lured by the shouting, trotted up with fire in his eyes. "What's the trouble here? What's the trouble with a cop?" he demanded, and Eddie, shoving a handful of fingers through his black hair, beat Mulvaney to the vocabulary.

"I'll tell you what's the trouble! It's my girl, Jean. I'm not good enough for her. I get grease and oil on my hands, so I'm not good

enough for the daughter of a big shot cop — ain't that right, Sergeant Mulvaney?"

It wasn't right, at least, not the way Eddie was saying it; but Mulvaney couldn't get a word in.

"Mulvaney!" screamed Papa Kovack. "So that's it! Trying to frame my son so he can't see your girl! Well, you better not try anything, Sergeant Mulvaney. Maybe you've got a soft job riding around all day at the taxpayer's expense, but I have to work my seat off for my dough and so does Eddie. And we ain't ashamed of it! We ain't like some of these nice, clean people who come in wanting the speedometer set back so they can gyp the sucker buying their old heaps, or the ones with a little scratch on the fender who want it beat up good so they can get more from the insurance company. Clean people, Sergeant Mulvaney. Nice, clean people . . ."

Papa Kovack had a wrench in his hand and looked mad enough to use it. It was, Mulvaney decided, one of the times that called for a strategic withdrawal.

5.

"If I'd have been the old man I would have clobbered you with the wrench," Costello said. "Let me get this straight. Are you trying to tell me that you went after that kid just because he came to date your daughter wearing blue jeans? Show me a boy who *doesn't* wear blue jeans!"

Mulvaney had come straight to headquarters where they were holding homecoming day for derelicts and registered degenerates. Out in the next room they were being sorted, questioned, filed, and finally released to become anonymous with the crowds again; but Mulvaney was in the office of Lieutenant Costello, who had a couple of years seniority on him and should have known what he was talking about.

"You don't understand," Mulvaney protested. "I've got a *feeling* about this case. I remember now. It started yesterday when we first found the body. All of a sudden I felt sick —"

"It was awfully hot up in the hills yesterday," Costello cut in.

"You don't understand!"

"Maybe I do." Costello looked thoughtful for a moment. He rocked back in his chair and peered at Mulvaney through half-closed eyes. "How old is your daughter?" he asked.

"Eighteen," Mulvaney answered.

Costello nodded. "That's what I thought. This is all in your mind, Mulvaney. All in your subconscious. Your daughter's eighteen. She's going out on dates. One of these days she'll be getting married —"

"What?"

Mulvaney's exclamation seemed to please Costello. "There, you see," he said, "that's your trouble. Your little girl's grown up now and you can't face it. You don't like her boyfriend. Maybe he's the one who's

going to take her away from you. So who is this Eddie Kovack, anyway? Maybe he's a bum. Maybe he's a delinquent. Maybe he's a killer . . ."

"You're talking crazy!" Mulvaney cried. "What about that old coupe he was painting? What about the color inside the lid?"

"What about the color of Kovack's hair?" Costello asked.

"His hair?" The question caught Mulvaney off guard. He had to think a minute. "Black, I think. Dark."

"Not blonde?"

It had to be important. Costello didn't ask questions to be cute. He shoved a sheet of paper across his desk and Mulvaney picked it up. It was a lab report on the dead girl. She'd put up a fight all right. Minute particles of flesh had been found under her fingernails together with a few blonde hairs.

. . . Blonde hairs. Mulvaney couldn't fight that. He sank back against the lieutenant's desk feeling both ashamed and stunned. He'd been so sure of this lead — and why? Just because of an uneasy feeling and a sudden fear. No wonder the lieutenant was looking at him the same way Madge had looked at him last night. *Poor old Mulvaney, he's cracking under the strain. Four brutal murders in as many months, and he lets it unnerve him!* A clerk walked in from the outer office, leaving the door open. Outside the scum of the city was getting its routine passport to freedom. Mulvaney had to have some place to vent his chagrin.

"Look at them out there," he muttered. "They should all be locked up for life — or shot down."

"Mulvaney!"

"Well, why not? It's only a matter of time until one of that crowd out there leaves a body in the bushes somewhere. The world's gone rotten, Costello! Like my neighbor says —"

"So we start shooting down everybody we don't like and make it smell sweet again! I have neighbors too, Mulvaney. I tell them if they don't like the way I do my job they can do it for me."

It took a lot to get Costello riled, but he was riled now.

"I think you'd better go home and cool off, Mulvaney. Take a rest for yourself. Forget the rotten world and this 'feeling' of yours."

"Go home?" Mulvaney echoed. "Why?"

"I just told you why. Go home until you forget about this hunch of yours. That's an order!"

There was only one thing to do with an order, but going home was a lot easier than forgetting. A cop who's been a cop for twenty years can't just turn it off like that. By the time he turned the corner past Roberta Gibbon's bungalow, Mulvaney's 'feeling' was back stronger than ever. Apparently he'd been wrong about Eddie Kovack, but Costello had given him a clue with that talk about his subconscious. Suppose he had seen something suspicious right here in his own neigh-

borhood, something or someone that was buried deep in his mind where he couldn't quite reach it? A blonde kid with a scratch on his head, for instance? Roberta Gibbons might know how to help him exhume that knowledge. She was an intelligent woman.

But there was no sign of life at her bungalow, in spite of it being Saturday and no school. Mulvaney drove on home, half a mind to stroll over later; but half a mind wasn't enough for getting the car into a garage recently ransacked for camping equipment, and once he'd become acquainted with the contents of one ill-fated cardboard carton there was no room in his mind for anything else . . .

"Daddy? Is that you?"

Mulvaney looked up from the fistful of photographs he'd been studying and then held them close to his chest. They weren't the sort of collection he cared to share with Jean.

"I thought I heard you drive in," she said. "What's the matter? Aren't you feeling well?"

Mulvaney didn't feel at all well. Not now.

"Where's Kenny?" he demanded.

"Why, Kenny's gone for the week-end. I thought you knew. . . . What's wrong, Daddy? Is it something about that box?"

She couldn't help noticing. The left front wheel had done a thorough job on it.

"What do you know about this

box?" Mulvaney asked, and Jean, looking more bewildered by the moment, shook her head.

"Nothing, really, but Kenny doesn't either. It belongs to Junior Simpson."

"Junior Simpson!"

"He brought it over this morning when I was helping Kenny find his fishing box. He just asked if he could leave it here for a while. I don't know why —"

Mulvaney knew why, but he didn't take time to explain . . .

Junior Simpson was a handsome kid, a little older than Kenny and a little longer-legged in his tight blue jeans. He was sitting on the back steps re-stringing a tennis racket when Mulvaney came bursting through the hedges. His blonde head came up quickly when Mulvaney shoved the photographs under his nose.

"I think these belong to you, Junior," he said.

The boy's face was instantly scarlet.

"Where did you get those?" he gasped.

"Where do you think I got them? What's the matter, Junior? Afraid your father wouldn't approve of your taste in art? Is that why you palmed this trash off on Kenny?"

Mulvaney made no effort to keep his voice down. Art was spraying rose bushes across the yard. He could no more help hearing and coming to see what the trouble was about than Junior could help breaking out in a

sweat when his father took the photographs from Mulvaney's hand. Cheap trash, that's all it was. The high schools had been flooded with it lately.

"I don't understand kids any more," Mulvaney said. "They can have a good home, a good family —" And then that scared feeling came over him again, the same feeling he'd had last night when he saw Eddie Kovack standing in the doorway. Junior Simpson had blonde hair. He wore it long and in deep waves. There could be scratches under those waves. "You have a car, don't you, Junior?" he asked. "Ever use it to pick up girls?"

"Now, wait a minute," Art cut in. "Suppose you leave the disciplining of my son to me, Jim? After all, these pictures are one thing —"

"— and a murdered girl is another," Mulvaney finished. "But some things have a way of going together. Like that case last year. When we finally found the killer his room was filled with this trash."

"Killer!"

Both Simpsons screamed the word at once. "What are you trying to pin on me?" Junior howled. "These pictures don't mean anything. My old man sells calendars worse than these!"

"Shut up!" Art snapped. "As for you, Jim, I think you'd better get back on your own side of the hedge."

"Yeah, why don't you cross-examine Kenny?" Junior chimed in "Why stop with me?"

"My son doesn't have a car," Mulvaney said.

"The *heck* he doesn't! You may be a cop, Mr. Mulvaney, but you don't know everything. You just ask Kenny about his car. Ask him who owns that old heap Jean's boyfriend keeps for him down at his old man's service station. He even had it painted yesterday. Go ahead, ask him!"

Mulvaney didn't answer. He couldn't even think any more. He just reacted from impulse . . .

. . . Because sometimes a cop got a feeling about a case. Nothing he could put his finger on, exactly. Just a feeling. Back in his own kitchen, Mulvaney found Madge unloading groceries from her shopping bag. She knew about Kenny's car, of course. There had to be a reason for the way she'd gotten so busy with that skillet of chicken when he brought up the subject last night.

"He was going to tell you," she explained, "but you were in such a bad humor. After all, it was his money, Jim, and he is a good driver. You have to trust your own children. You have to have faith!"

It was only what Mulvaney expected her to say, but this time he didn't argue. This time he wanted to believe every sunshine and light word of it even if the dread was eating like cancer at his mind. So Kenny owned an old coupe that had been dirty tan. So he had blonde hair like his mother and wore blue

jeans like all the other boys. What of it? It wasn't anything at all. It was what Costello said it was — in his subconscious. Look at the fool he'd made of himself chasing after Eddie Kovack and Junior Simpson. Forget it, Mulvaney. Take a rest. Take a nap, or take a stroll over to Roberta Gibbons's house and talk this crazy thing out of your system. She's an intelligent woman. She'll make you see that it's nothing at all . . .

But then the telephone rang, and even before he answered it Mulvaney knew it was something. It was Costello calling from headquarters.

6.

They had a long, fast drive with the siren going, and then a hurried huddle with the State Police officers at the crossroads.

"It's that tow-truck driver," one of them explained. "Says he saw that kid again this morning. Went up to the lake on a dead battery call and saw him fooling around the fishing pier. Yelled at him and the kid took off for the hills. He must still be up there. He can't have gone far without a car."

"Have you found the car?" Costello asked.

The officer shook his head. "Not yet. He probably has it hidden away somewhere — maybe even repainted."

"Okay, we'll get started. Mulvaney, you know this country pretty

well. Didn't you used to come up here every year on your vacation?"

With my son, Mulvaney thought. *With my wife and my daughter and my son.*

"Maybe you know of some place where the kid could be hiding out. A cave, a cabin —"

Mulvaney looked up at the hills. From the highway they were nothing. You had to drive up a winding road to reach the timber, and then a few miles more to the lake with its little summer houses scattered about like chickens around a hen. In summer the lake could get as crowded as a city block unless you knew how to find the streams further up and where to make camp for the night.

"Let me off at the lake," he said. "I'll have a look further up."

"Mulvaney —"

Costello's voice had authority in it. This wasn't just an old friend shooting the breeze at headquarters.

"If you find that kid, I want him alive. Alive and unhurt, understand?"

Mulvaney understood. It was Costello who didn't understand now . . .

7.

It was the hottest part of the day. The sun, having passed its zenith an hour ago, slanted down through the scrub pine in wide ribbons of white fire. There was no wind in the timber — just the ribbons of sunlight and a dry silence broken only by the

sound of Mulvaney's plodding footsteps and heavy breathing. He paused to wipe his face with a wilted handkerchief and looked behind him. He was alone. He'd outdistanced the others and gone far ahead, because Mulvaney knew where he was going. The thing he didn't know was what he might find when he got there. But he had to keep going. He had to get there first.

And now Mulvaney's mind seemed to separate into two parts that argued with itself all the way. *This is foolishness, Mulvaney. This is all in your mind. It was just a coincidence what the state trooper said about that coupe being painted, and it couldn't have been Kenny the tow truck driver saw on the pier. Kenny had gone on an outing with his friends.*

"... to the lake," Madge reminded.

"But there are many lakes," Mulvaney's mind protested. *"The kids had no reason to choose this one."*

"You know this country pretty well," Costello cut in. *"Didn't you used to come here on your vacations?"*

"With my son! You have to have faith in your own kids!"

But the other part of Mulvaney's mind was a cop, and the other part remembered a dead girl in the bushes. And the feeling. This strange, uneasy sense of something wrong . . . But why Kenny? Use your head, Mulvaney. A boy from a good home doesn't turn killer without reason!

"It's these crazy times we're living

in," Art Simpson said. "*Nothing's sacred any more.*"

But now Mulvaney's mind rebelled. What kind of reasoning was that? Was time a thing separate in itself — some irresistible force that could wreck an innocent life caught in its web? Even a dumb cop, the almighty taxpayer's hired hand, no less, knew better than that! Time was what you made of it. Look at Madge. The evil of time hadn't touched her. Not in any important way.

And then Mulvaney began to remember things about his wife that he'd forgotten for many a year. How they used to come up to the lake every summer when the kids were small, and she'd spend her vacation cleaning and drying the fish he and Kenny caught in the stream he was heading for now — the one with the lean-to shelter built against the rocks where a kid too scared to think straight might try to hide from his searchers. And the year the kids got poison ivy and she took care of them, and the times they were frightened and went running to her arms just the way his mind was running to her now. And the times she sat up with them all night when they were sick, watching, caring for them, praying for them . . .

"*Maternal coddling!*" Roberta Gibbons scoffed. "*Psychiatrists tell us . . .*"

"*Shut up!*" Mulvaney yelled. "*Madge is my wife!*"

He'd reached the clearing. He stopped at the edge of it, his eyes

prying out the barely discernible lean-to against the rocks. He waited, still listening to the echo of his own silent cry, and then, slowly, Mulvaney began to understand.

Hadn't he seen it time and time again? Didn't every criminal from a small-time pickpocket to a three-time loser try to shift his guilt onto somebody else? Eddie Kovack, Junior Simpson, and the crazy way he'd blown up at the sight of that roomful of derelicts down at headquarters — what was any of it but the same old pattern of a man trying to run away from himself? No wonder he sensed danger. No wonder he was afraid. But his mind would fight the truth, of course. Roberta Gibbons meant nothing to him! Not *that* way. Jim Mulvaney was a family man, a man who honored his vows. He only wanted to talk to the woman. He merely admired her mind . . . *and the way her dresses didn't rip out at the hips, and her slips never showed beneath the hem, and the way the seams of her stockings were always straight all the way down her legs.*

. . . Because Madge Mulvaney wore cheap dresses from the bargain basements that shrunk in the wash, so that Jean could have a new dress for a ball; and Madge Mulvaney's kitchen smelled of fried food because a police sergeant's pay won't feed a family of four on a diet of pheasant under glass, or else it smelled of baking for the church because a simple minded woman like Madge Mulvaney couldn't live without the faith of

giving . . . No, the evil of time couldn't change Madge. There was no evil in her to respond to fear.

For a long time Mulvaney stood at the edge of the clearing getting everything straight in his mind: the "feeling," the fear, the danger. But the other part of Mulvaney was still a cop, and a cop's keen eyes caught on a bit of blue something snagged on the bushes an arm's length away. Denim, it was. Faded blue denim. He was right. The lean-to was just the kind of thing a boy too scared to think would use for a hideout. For a moment he felt sick, the same as he'd felt yesterday when they came across that body in the bushes, and then he remembered the kind of mother he'd found for his kids and walked forward . . .

There was no gun in the hand of Mulvaney when he stopped at the lean-to door. He listened. He could actually hear the terrified breathing inside.

"Come on out, son," he said quietly. "Don't make things any tougher on yourself. Come out with your hands up."

And the kid came out, white faced and whimpering. A skinny-legged kid in blue jeans with the sun kindling gold fire in his hair. Mulvaney

had never seen him before in his life.

8.

Madge was in the kitchen when Mulvaney got home. There was something frying in a skillet on the stove, and Madge was at the sink cleaning fish. She looked up, smiling, when he came in. The late editions were out but she hadn't read them, of course.

"Look what Kenny and the boys caught," she said brightly. "They were going to be gone for the weekend, but they caught a lot of fish and had no ice to keep them so they came home. Wasn't that thoughtful of them?"

"They're good boys," Mulvaney said.

"And good fish!" Madge paused to tug at her shoulder strap. "I'll have them ready for the pan in a jiffy. I've already got the potatoes frying, so we can have dinner in no time."

When Mulvaney laughed Madge wanted to know what was so funny. He couldn't tell her. He kissed her instead, as she hadn't been kissed in a long time, which was a lot easier and much more pleasant.



CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

Thefts by Trick

In a Chicago, Ill., currency exchange, a young woman walked up to the cashier and informed him, "I'm your relief. You can take off now."

As soon as he left she "relieved" the firm of \$9,100.

Emil A. Singer's suburban Buffalo, N. Y., tavern, ordinarily closed on Tuesdays, delighted customers by remaining open through the day with two cheerful young men in charge. Suddenly, with business thriving, they disappeared. When Mr. and Mrs. Singer came in from their afternoon off, they were told that their "new bartenders" had walked out. They found then that the thieves had forced the front door, taken \$40 already in the till and got about another \$65 from the day's unscheduled business.

Three Butte Montana, hotels got telephone calls early one morning telling them that smoke was pouring from their upper windows. While night clerks investigated in two of the hotels, thieves got about \$229 from the tills, but at the third hotel the night porter foiled them by re-

maining at the desk to give the alarm in case there was any danger.

Steel Versus Steel

In Chicago, Edward Burgess, 22, got away in handcuffs from the police narcotics bureau. Recaptured a week later, they asked him how he got rid of the handcuffs. "I ran to a rail yard and put the connecting chain under the wheel of a freight car that was being pushed slowly," he told them. "It snapped the cuffs pretty."

Piecework

In Rouyn, Quebec, police arrested Marc Gratton, a 31-year-old welder, for larceny, on the installment plan. He removed an entire underground pump from the Quemont gold mine — in his lunch pail, piece by piece, over a three-year period. Apparently he intended to sell the pump, which officers found reassembled in his basement. Six policemen worked two hours loading the equipment onto a truck for its trip back to the gold mine.

Easy Way

State Policeman Glen Thomas of Shelton, Conn., faced the problem

of apprehending a suspect known to be in a crowded movie theater. He had the man paged and, when he came out into the lobby, placed him under arrest.

Circumstantial Clue

Martin Menge, 36, was arrested on robbery charges when New York police saw him racing down the street followed by a gagged man with his hands tied behind his back. The sprinting victim was a jeweler, William Ruckel, 48, whom Menge had just robbed.

Left Flat

When Paul G. Cromwell of San Bernardino, Calif., had a flat tire in Dakota City, Neb., he got out and prepared to walk to his job. He hadn't left the car when two helpful strangers drove up and offered assistance. Then, at gunpoint, they relieved Cromwell of the \$72 in his billfold, luggage containing most of his clothes, and the car's spare tire.

Damp Decency

In Corpus Christi, Texas, Patrolman R. C. Kinstley rescued a woman from the bay, then explained why he dived in without removing his pants. "I didn't want to get arrested for indecency. That's a \$25 fine."

Canine Carrier

A narcotics peddler in San Francisco has a smart pooch. Agents arrested Quincy Cannon, 48, there

recently merely by following his dog. State Inspector Louis Noel said customers would put a bill into the dog's mouth and watch it trot off for home — whence it returned promptly with the narcotics. Tipped off, the agents planted marked money with an informer and then followed the pup.

Acid Test

In Chihuahua, Mexico, Guillermo Salas told police he had burned down one of the town's biggest buildings "to test the efficiency of the fire department."

Memory Slip

A Los Angeles attorney, Cletus J. Hannifin, 47, who runs a large income tax filing service, was recently fined \$1000 and put on three years' probation — for failure to file his own tax return.

Cowed

In Dwight, Ill., state police recaptured one of two escapees from the women's reformatory because she was halted by a field of cows. Pearl Elen, 19, was caught shortly after she climbed over a pasture fence after fleeing the reformatory with Shirley Weiland, 26. Miss Weiland, undaunted by the cows, hitchhiked as far as Plainsfield before she too was recaptured.

Last Word

Police in St. Petersburg, Fla., are hunting a new type — a hit and run

driver who stopped to make excuses. Martin Dickinson complained to Patrolman Al Sevier that a woman motorist crashed into him, but stopped only long enough to gasp, "I haven't any money, I haven't any insurance, and I'm a sick woman."

Show Stopper

At a Kiwanis Club meeting in Omaha, Neb., U. S. Marshal William Raab asked for a volunteer to help him show how he chained desperate criminals. When Lyle Remde stepped up, Raab trussed him in leg chains and handcuffs, then paused in embarrassment. He had forgotten the keys. Volunteer Remde got an unexpected ride to the marshal's office before he could be released.

Growing Pains

Bellingham, Wash., detectives were investigating recently an accusation by a 70-year-old man that he was beaten by a rival of 84 seeking the affections of his 79-year-old sweetheart.

That Blunt Instrument Again

In Blackpool, England, the court fined Brian Winter five pounds (\$14) for slugging a victim with a blunt instrument — a stick of peppermint candy four inches thick and a yard long.

Loony Loot

Dallas, Tex., police were looking for a thief with odd tastes, after an 83-year-old woman reported that

someone broke into her house. The loot consisted of her two cats, and the false teeth she had left in a cup.

Sittin' Pretty

From a jail cell in Dothan, Ala., John Lloyd Bedsole, 34, of that city, is fighting extradition following his bloodless withdrawal from a Florida road gang. While serving a six-months' sentence for highway drunkenness, Bedsole was working with a road gang clear up to the Alabama line. The guards called a rest period and chose a shady spot which was just over the Florida border. When the rest was over, Bedsole refused to move and told the guards he was out of their jurisdiction. Gov. James E. Folsom signed extradition papers when Florida Gov. Leroy Collins asked for them.

Always Prepared

Dallas, Tex., police won an admission of theft from a 13-year-old boy who had stolen 1,500 pencils from a local advertising firm.

"School starts pretty soon," he explained.

Traffic Jam

A Hartford, Conn., citizen, arrested by his landlord for chopping a hole through his kitchen wall, explained to city housing authorities that he had to make a new passageway to keep his off-spring from parading between him and the TV set in the living room.

Hot Tip

Alex Hill, 33, of Philadelphia, Pa., was charged with suspicion of stealing a hot stove on the street before dawn. Police, noticing that he had to put it down every few feet to cool his hands, investigated and found burning coals inside. Hill's story that a former tenant of a nearby house had given it to him was denied by the landlord.

Joker

In Duncan, Okla., Ben James Johnson, 25, of Dallas, Tex., failed in his attempt to hold up a grocery store with a cap pistol, and sheepishly bought six slices of bologna from the establishment. When he left, the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Ben Williams, called police, who converged upon the "criminal" and took him under arrest.



Contest Winner: YOU, detective

No. 7 — THE OUTSIDE JOB

*Mrs. Pat Anderson
1240 River Street
Roseburg, Oregon*

Sergeant Hammond turned to Ellen Barbour. "You said you were too ill to go outside, Mrs. Barbour—but there's fresh mud on your shoes. You also said that you saw Miss Hunt's light on during the time of the murder. To see a light in a window on the second floor, you'd have to be outside the house. Want to tell us about it now, Mrs. Barbour?"

The tall blonde woman slumped in her chair. Marcia Hunt turned and stared at her.

"Your pretended illness just didn't work, did it?" Marcia Hunt whispered. "You saw John's money slipping through your fingers . . . you had to prevent that. So you killed him."

"I killed him," Ellen Barbour said. "I knew you were after his money. He brought you here. I couldn't stand it—you and John, looking at each other, thinking nobody saw you, together at night while I waited alone . . ." The blonde woman stood suddenly and came forward. "And I'd kill you, too . . ."

Hammond was between them.

"All right," he said tiredly. "All right. That's all."

He took Ellen Barbour's arm. She went with him, out of the quiet house.



*He was a musician of great stature. And
a dangerous man to be loose in this world.*

Suffer Little Children

BY DE FORBES



THE MAN Who Hated Children gave the little boy some candy and a balloon. Then he showed him the cap gun.

"Do you play cowboy and Indians?" he asked the little boy.

"Sometimes. But Mom doesn't like me to have a gun. So I just use a stick."

"Why doesn't your Mother let you have a gun? I thought all little boys had guns."

"My daddy has one. He says it's dan—dangerous for me. Mom says there's too much shooting . . . play-like and real. What does she mean?"

"I don't know. All the boys have guns. You should have one, too. Why don't you borrow your Daddy's? I'll show you how to shoot."

"I know how." The small boy was proud. "I borrowed Skinny

Taylor's the other day. You just pull the trigger and say, 'Bang! You're dead!'"

"That's right. I certainly think it's a shame that you can't have a gun. But I guess you're scared to use your Daddy's."

"I am not! I am not scared! I'm not scared of anything. I'll go get it right now and show it to you. You wait right here. Will you?"

"Sure. Sure. I'll wait right here."

And the small boy was off running hard, afraid that his new-found friend might go away before he could show him that he wasn't afraid.

He stole quietly into the house, into the bedroom where his father lay sleeping. Silently, oh so silently he pulled open the top drawer of the big bureau and took out his father's shiny gun. He was almost out of the house when his Mother's voice stopped him.

"Bobby," she said sharply, "where are you going? What have you got in your hand? Bobby! Put that down! Oh, no, no. No, darling!"

"Bang!" said Bobby pulling the trigger, "You're dead!"

The Man Who Hated Children smiled as he hurried homeward. He'd have to wait to find out what had happened. But he was sure something had. It was so simple. Just like lighting a fire near a keg of dynamite.

Police Lieutenant Brandon closed the door of his son's room. "He

finally went to sleep," he told the men assembled in his living room. "He doesn't know exactly what happened, thank God." There were lines of pain and weariness on the lieutenant's face. He didn't look at the other bedroom even though the door was closed.

"God, Bruce, I can't tell you . . ." one of the men began.

"Don't say it, Carl," Brandon cut in. "Just listen to the kid's story. Listen hard, because there's a monster loose and we're going to get him.

Rudy awoke with a slight headache. He lay in his bed listening to the movements of his mother downstairs in the kitchen. She was singing. He guessed she was glad to have him home for a visit. He didn't get home very often any more. Which was just as well. Christ, what a stupid town. Bunch of yokels. He, Rudy Kleinman, had been almost everywhere in the world and he had to stick in this burg for another ten days. It might be a city to most people, but to Rudy Kleinman—Christ!"

The headache began to leave him and he decided to get up. Not that there was anything to do. But maybe he could find some excitement somewhere. He usually could if he tried hard enough. He dressed carefully, as he always did. White shirt, blue slacks, polka-dot tie. He never did it consciously. Good clothes were a habit with him.

"Well, Rudy," said his mother at the foot of the stairs. "Did you finally decide to get up?"

"Morning, Mother," he gave her an offhand kiss that landed on her chin. "How's my little Mother this morning?"

"Your 'little Mother' is fine." Mrs. Kleinman laughed. "How about some ham and eggs?"

She had already eaten breakfast, so she drank coffee while he tackled his. He was a fastidious eater, using his napkin delicately.

"Here's the paper, Son." She passed it to him. It had been thoroughly read and was in disheveled sections.

"Mother, how many times have I asked you to please put the paper together in the order in which it came? Where's the front page?"

"I'm sorry, Son. It's there somewhere. I just can't seem to enjoy it unless I take it apart. You're just like your Father. He never liked things out of order either. I well remember—"

But Rudy was no longer listening. He had found the front page and now he was avidly reading the feature story.

BOY 5 SHOOTS MOTHER TO DEATH

Bobby Brandon, five, of 2 Bel-lair Street, accidentally shot and killed his mother early yesterday evening in the living room of their home. Bobby,

son of Police Lieutenant Bruce Brandon, had apparently taken his father's gun for a game with his playmates. When Mrs. Brandon, the former Earlene Paul of this city, tried to take the gun it went off. She was killed instantly. Bobby is an only child.

Funeral services will be held Wednesday at two p.m. at the First Church on High Street. Police are baffled by Bobby's action in taking the gun, since his father was extremely careful to keep it away from the child and to teach him respect for firearms. Police Lieutenant Brandon was asleep in the bedroom when his son took the gun from the top drawer of the bureau.

Rudy smiled. A police lieutenant's son. Very amusing. "You'd think they'd teach their children to leave those things alone," he said aloud.

"What? . . . Oh, that story about the little Brandon boy. Isn't that terrible? They live only a few blocks from here. I wonder whatever possessed him to take that gun? You can never depend on a child's explanations, especially if they're as full of imagination as you were. Do you remember when we were on that. . ." But Rudy again was not listening. That's true, he thought. Adults seldom listen to the prattling of a child.

His mother's voice cut in on his thoughts. "It's just like having it happen next door. Just three blocks—"

"Yes, I know."

"You know? But you don't know the Brandons. They moved here after you left. How—?"

"The address, Mother. Two Bellair Street. I know where Bellair Street is."

"Oh, yes. I suppose you do. Well, it's a terrible thing. I've said it a million times if I've said it once. Children have no business playing around with firearms. And you'd think a policeman—"

"Yes, Mother. You certainly would." Rudy and the paper moved into the living room.

There he felt the urge to play the piano. There was a slight film of dust over the top that annoyed him. He felt quite good, however, and decided to overlook it. His mother, hearing the melodious strains of Chopin, smiled as she washed the dishes.

That afternoon Rudy met, quite by accident, Miss Evangeline Durkin who lived next door.

Evangeline was a very pretty young lady in her late teens. She had heard that Mrs. Kleinman's son was due in town and was frankly curious and eager to meet him. As it happened she had been slightly indisposed that morning and stayed home from work. She began to feel better by mid-afternoon and ventured out on her land-

lady's porch. On the neighboring porch sat a male individual who was, obviously, the mysterious Rudy Kleinman. Evangeline suddenly remembered that Mrs. Kleinman had invited her to cut some flowers for her room. She took advantage of the invitation.

Evangeline interested Rudy. He could see at once that she wasn't very clever, but the combination of her child-like manner and her petiteness he found fascinating. As a result he invited her to attend the movies. Mrs. Kleinman was quite pleased. She thought Evangeline was very sweet and Rudy was usually never interested in girls.

They had been gone only a short time when the reporter called. Mrs. Kleinman was sipping lemonade when the doorbell rang.

"How do you do?" said the reporter. "I'm from the Times. You must be Mrs. Kleinman. Is your son in?"

"Why, no." The press always flustered Mrs. Kleinman. She knew her son was quite famous in many parts of the world, but she had never been able to get used to the fact. "Won't you come in? He's gone to the movies. Perhaps I can help you."

"Well," said the reporter as he sampled the lemonade offered him, "as you know we always run a feature on Mr. Kleinman whenever he comes home and I thought I could get some fresh material.

Where's he been lately, and so forth."

"Why, of course." Mrs. Kleinman loved to talk about her son's accomplishments. "He has just returned from Europe. His fourth trip, you know."

"Umm. He's a pianist, is that right?"

"Yes. He sings, too, and does some impersonations. He keeps improving his act all the time. I have clippings from all over the world. Would you like to see some? They call him a genius and a fascinating figure."

"That won't be necessary. I have quite a bit of that in the files. I'd like to get some of the personal stuff. Local angle, you know. His father is no longer living?"

"No." Mrs. Kleinman sighed. "He died when Rudy was six. He was a fine pianist, too, you know. It was such a tragedy. He died so young."

"Was it an accident?"

"Oh, yes. A terrible thing. I had gone shopping that morning and Mr. Kleinman was at the piano, composing and practicing, you know. Rudy was listening to him when I left and the baby was asleep in his crib."

"Oh, I didn't know there was another child."

"Yes, there was. A boy—Edward. Named after his father. Only ten months old. Well, anyway, I was coming home when I saw the fire engines. I had no idea they were

coming to my house. But they did.

"They were never quite sure what had happened. Rudy met me on the way, sobbing and screaming. He was so frightened. He told me that his father had become annoyed at him and had sent him outside to play. Suddenly he smelled something burning and went around the house to see what it was. The living room curtains were all ablaze. Rudy rushed into the house, but the living room was an inferno. He couldn't get in. His father and the baby died. They found Edward, my husband, with young Edward in his arms. They had died from the smoke. There was just one thing . . ."

"Yes, Mrs. Kleinman?"

"We had kerosene lamps then, you see. A large one usually sat on the table by the hall. It was moved. To a table by the baby's crib. We never found out why or how. Perhaps Edward had moved it for some reason. It was a dark, dismal day. Anyway, they thought the baby must have pushed it over. It was right next to him, you see. But they never knew."

The reporter passed on to a few other questions and started to leave.

"Do you want a picture?" asked Mrs. Kleinman.

"We have a new one. Last year's, I think," he replied.

"Oh, yes. The profile. Rudy prefers a profile."

The reporter thanked her profusely and took his leave. Mrs.

Kleinman felt rather depressed after he left. She hadn't talked of the death of her husband and the baby for quite some time. Rudy never liked to discuss it . . . which was easily understood.

It was at the movies that Evangeline mentioned the Brandons. "Isn't it terrible? I suppose you read about it. Mrs. Brandon and I were in the same choral group. I imagine I'll be given time off to go to the funeral." She looked at him sideways. "You wouldn't care to go with me, would you?"

"Go with you to a funeral?"

"Well, I know it isn't a pleasant thing; but you're going to be here only a short time and I have to work six days a week, you know. And sometimes evenings — we're very busy. I think you're awfully nice and—well, I know this is very bold of me, but I'd like to see you as often as possible. It's seldom I get to meet a celebrity, you know."

"I'm sure I'd like to, but a funeral . . . Well, I'm afraid I couldn't."

"Oh, it won't be long. We won't go to the cemetery or anything. There'll be mobs of people there, practically the whole town. To pay their respects. Maybe afterwards we could do something." Again the side glance.

"Yes, perhaps we could. It's hard to resist you Evangeline. You're just a child, but when you look at me like *that* . . . still, after all, you are just a baby, aren't you?"

She giggled. "Then you will take me?"

"It's a date. And I think I'll rent a car and we can go out somewhere for dinner. Make a big evening of it. Yes. I think it will be very interesting to go to the funeral of Bobby Brandon's mother."

The day of the funeral was bright and sunny. It was late when he went to pick up Evangeline at her office. When they reached the church it was crowded to the doors and Rudy and Evangeline had to be content to stand just outside.

All during the service Evangeline kept standing on tiptoe trying to see inside. Her whispered comments caused many a head wearing a frown to turn their way. Rudy was embarrassed. When the procession by the casket began Evangeline wanted to join it. Rudy demurred, "I'll wait in the car."

"All right. Oh, look, Rudy—there's the little boy! Oh, he's swallowed up by the crowd. You can't see him now. Rudy, where are you? Oh, there you are. I'll go in and pay my respects and be right out."

She was gone perhaps fifteen minutes, a fact which did not help Rudy's headache. He hated waiting.

When she did come, she was like a little girl released from school. "There!" she said, "that's over. Where shall we go?"

"You tell me. It's been a long

time since I've gone out in this town. What do you suggest?"

She suggested dinner at a very expensive, and Rudy thought, overdone restaurant on the outskirts of town. During the meal, Evangeline prattled on about anything and everything. Rudy, perhaps through necessity, was fairly silent.

At last they were out of the place and driving down a moonlit high way.

"What strong hands you have, Rudy," she said at one point as he guided the car around a turn. He looked down at them almost as if he had never seen them before.

"Yes, I guess I do. I never thought much about it."

"I guess that comes from playing the piano. What else do you do on the stage, Rudy?"

"Most everything. At least I have at one time or another. It was very difficult beginning, you see. You have to do almost anything when you start."

"And just think! You've appeared before Kings and Queens! Your mother told me all about it."

"Yes, I have. Command performances before the crowned heads of Europe. And Asia. I, Rudy Kleinman!"

He speeded up the car as she moved a little closer to him. Suddenly he braked the vehicle and turned into a side road. It was bumpy and deserted. Evangeline giggled. Rudy found it a rather foolish giggle.

After a mile or so he pulled up by the side of the lake. "I thought I remembered this place," he said half to himself.

"Why, Rudy!" Her voice evinced surprise. "You've brought other girls here!"

"Certainly I have! You sound as though you think I've never gone out with another girl. But, believe me, Evangeline, I never brought one here for the same reason that I have brought you here. I was just a child then—a child, like you."

She moved even closer. Her head was against the back of the seat.

"Didn't some one have a child bride, Rudy? In one of those English books?"

"Hmmm. Yes. David Copperfield. Her name was Dora. She died—very young."

"Oh, isn't that sad? I think it's so sad to die young. Don't you Rudy?"

"Oh, I don't know. I sometimes think it's the best time. The young can be irritating, you know. They think they know more than their elders and have no gratitude or proper appreciation. They're cruel, the children. They laugh in your face and make fun of your appearance if you're the least bit different. They call names and throw stones. They have egg on their faces and mayhem in their hearts. They're nasty-minded ugly little brutes!"

"Why, Rudy! Don't you like children? Of course you do. Every-

one does when they have their own. What if your mother didn't like you? I think I'd like to have three of my own some day. Two boys and a girl."

"Of course I like children, Evangeline." He laughed. "Don't let what I said alarm you. If I didn't like children I couldn't like you. I can't get over how like a little girl you are. Do you think you'll ever grow up, Evangeline?"

She giggled again and tossed her curls. "I don't think so. Mother always said I was a character right out of Peter Pan. I like being young. I hope I always will be, until the day I die."

"You will, my dear," he said. "Close your eyes, will you, darling? Close your eyes and lean back. It's such a beautiful night. So perfect for you and me."

She smiled at him, closed her eyes and leaned back. He brought up his arms, looked at his hands. Then he turned towards her. She kept her eyes closed waiting for his caress.

Police Lieutenant Brandon came wearily into the Chief's office. The Chief and the Time's reporter seated there jumped up.

"Did you get him?"

Brandon nodded. He was very tired.

"Nasty business. Very nasty. He's babbling like a maniac. And laughing. Laughing at every other word."

"What was the clincher?"

"Bobby. The guy had the nerve to come to the funeral. Bobby saw him outside when the girl got into his car. Told me that was the new pal who told him to get the gun. Guess you might say my son avenged his mother's death."

But why? Why did he do it? He didn't know you or your wife, did he?"

"Never saw us in his life. That didn't matter to him. The Doc has a name for it. So do I. But no matter what the explanation, he's a bad one to be loose in the world. We got there just in time. Another minute and—well, the Durskin girl's safe at home now."

"How did you find them?"

"When he didn't drive her home, we tried lovers' lane. We alerted all squad cars, of course. But thank God we were right."

"I wonder," said the reporter, "just what made him snap."

"He's raving about his father and his brother. Says he killed them. Says they hated him. He's wacky of course. Hates kids. Despises them. Guess they tormented the life out of him as long as he can remember. No telling how many he's—well, no use thinking about that. We've got him. We can't send him to the chair, I'm afraid, but he'll sure spend the rest of his life where he can't hurt anyone else."

"That's a funny one," said the Chief. "He was well off, famous, wasn't he? Seems to me I've heard

of him. Some kind of entertainer, wasn't he?"

"Yes, been all over the world. But that's part of the reason, you see."

"What do you mean?"

"His being an entertainer. It's all tied up together. He had no other choice if he wanted to eat. He had to be an entertainer. What else can a midget do in this world to get along?"



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Two Hours to Midnight

Anybody can make a mistake. But when a detective makes one it can mean—death!



A Michael Shayne Novel
BY BRETT HALLIDAY

EVELYN THOMPSON yawned not too prettily as she lounged in front of the switchboard at the Hibiscus Hotel. Normally she was quite a pretty girl, but tonight her face was sullen, her lips pouting with discontent.

Still two and a half hours until midnight! Roger wouldn't wait. She knew darned well he wouldn't. Not for a whole two hours. Just her luck to have the other operator call up at ten to say she had a headache and couldn't make it tonight. A headache? Haw! And her voice all blurry with gin. Wait'll she asked Evelyn for a favor. Just wait! That's all.

Evelyn yawned again and patted her open mouth delicately with flame-tipped fingers. Wouldn't be so bad if

there was anything doing, but after nine o'clock at night at the Hibiscus in the off-season it was like running a switchboard in a morgue. There'd be maybe half a dozen calls from partying rooms upstairs for more ice and soda before she went off at midnight. And that'd be all. For that, Evelyn had to sit there and miss her date with Roger.

And he'd be sore as the devil about it. This was distinctly not the point in her relationship with Roger to keep him waiting two hours with no explanation at all. She'd worked it so carefully up to now. Playing him along just enough so that tonight —

A light flashed on the board in front of her. She stopped yawning and sat a little more erect and leaned forward negligently to plug in the connection. Room 360. That was Mr. Drood. "Drooling Drood," they called him. Not that he was so bad, but he did sort of seem to drool when he looked at a girl. Because his face was puffy and pink and always sweaty, and his full lips always looked wet.

Funny he should be calling down now. Only twenty minutes ago that Miss Payne in 414 had called him from her room. Evelyn had listened in, of course. Sometimes you heard some real good stuff when the guests of different sexes called each other late in the evening. And she'd seen that affair shaping up the last few days, too.

Miss Payne was tall and had a sort of haughty way about her, but with a welcoming eye for the men for all that. Funny how she couldn't do better than old Drood. But then she was plenty old, too. Thirty-five at the least. And when you got that old, Evelyn thought complacently from her point of vantage at nineteen, you were just about ready to take anything that wore pants.

But they'd been very circumspect that earlier call. Just Miss Payne saying she'd found that piece in the paper she'd told Mr. Drood about that afternoon, and would he care to come up and get it? And Mr. Drood drooling into the phone how he'd love to, and maybe Miss Payne'd like it if he brought along a night-cap for the two of them. And Miss Payne saying she had the ice if he had anything to go along with it.

That was it, Evelyn told herself as the plug went in. No ice had gone up to 414 since about five o'clock. Probably just had a couple of half-melted cubes left, and when they decided to stretch the night-cap out into another one, old Drood had slipped back to his own room to order it—as if that was going to fool anybody in a hotel.

Into the mouthpiece beneath her chin, Evelyn Thompson said in dulcet tones, "Your call, please?"

A woman's voice answered from 360. Panting and strained, hoarsely hysterical: "There's a dead man in

three-sixteen. He's murdered. Oh, please hurry!" And there was a click that closed the connection.

Evelyn sat rigid, staring at the board with dilated eyes. But that was Mr. Drood's room. 360. It *was* plugged into 360. Her staring eyes verified that fact. Sounded like the woman said "three-sixteen". But it was 360. Sure it was. She must have heard wrong.

Murder? Evelyn frantically tried to call the number back. There was no answer. She jerked her head side-wise toward the profile of the clerk, half-dozing behind his desk, and whispered loudly, "Dick."

The profile stirred and the clerk's head turned languidly toward her. She motioned excitedly with one hand while she plugged in another connection.

The telephone buzzed in a private office behind the offices, and a man who was dozing, fully-clothed, on a old sofa in the small office slowly came to life.

Oliver Patton, "Chief Security Officer" of the Hibiscus, swung his feet over the edge of the sofa and sat up, rubbing his eyes. His was a twenty-four hour job since he was the only dick the hotel afforded, and he had to catch his sleep when he could.

He yawned as he glanced at his watch and reached for the phone beside the sofa. He was a big man who had gone steadily to fat since retiring from the police force a few years ago. His bunions both-

ered him a good deal but, with his wife's hospital bills, his pension simply wasn't enough and he needed this extra money.

Evelyn's low-pitched but excited voice leaped out of the receiver at him as he lifted it, "Trouble in three-sixty, Mr. Patton!"

"What kind of trouble?" he grunted sourly. "That's Drood, ain't it?"

"But it wasn't Mr. Drood. Some woman called. There's a dead man there."

"Dead?" Oliver Patton stopped scratching the fold of fat in front of his belly and his mouth gaped. "Drood?"

"I don't know. It's awful, Mr. Patton. You better get up there quick. She said murder. Should I call the police?"

"Murder?" Patton's voice took on a sharp note of authority. "Don't call anybody." He slammed down the phone and rose to his six feet two, his heavy face worried.

Murder in a hotel was real trouble. It was his job to keep the police out if there was any way possible. Of course, if it was murder, it wouldn't be possible. But he knew most of the boys on Homicide. Sometimes you could fix things so there wouldn't have to be any publicity.

He hurried out of his office and into the lobby where the clerk and bell-captain and elevator operator were grouped at the desk talking excitedly to Evelyn.

They all stopped talking and looked to him for advice as he came up with ponderous swiftness. He disregarded them and demanded of Evelyn, "What you got, girl?"

"Just that. A woman called from three-sixty and said there was a murdered man there. She hung right up on me and didn't answer when I called back."

"Come along, Bill," he snapped at the bell-captain. "You watch it here, Dick. Don't let anybody out . . . nobody up." He trotted heavily to the waiting elevator, and when the door slammed shut, asked the operator, "Bring anybody down recently?"

"They was a lady a few minutes ago, Chief. She come from Five." As the elevator stopped and he opened the doors, he asked anxiously, "What must I do?"

"Hold it right here," snapped Patton. "No matter how many bells ring." He turned to his left with Bill at his heels, moved swiftly but quietly toward a door standing open with light streaming out of it.

The open door was numbered 360. The overhead lights were on, revealing an impersonal hotel bedroom with a double bed in the corner between two windows. There was no woman in the room, and no dead man in sight. Everything was in perfect order with a man's bedroom's slippers showing from under the bed, a pair of vio-

lently flowered pajamas across the foot of it, a set of silver-backed brushes on the dressing-table.

Patton stopped just inside the open door for a full thirty seconds while he surveyed the seemingly empty room, then motioned for Bill to remain behind while he crossed to the closed bathroom door and jerked it open. He switched on the inside light and found it empty. He turned to the single closet in the room and opened that door. Half a dozen light suits or jackets were on hangers in perfect order. No one was concealed behind them.

Patton turned about with a puzzled frown, shaking his head dubiously at the bell-captain in the doorway, then dropped to his knees beside the bed, lifted the trailing coverlet to look beneath it carefully.

He got to his feet, brushing off his knees, his eyes hard and probing as he swept up the telephone from the small table at the head of the bed. He rumbled, "Have you gone nuts, Evelyn? There's no one here . . . alive or dead."

"But that's what she *said*. That there was a dead man. Murdered, she said. I can't help it, Mr. Patton, if . . ."

He growled, "Skip it. Tell me this. Drood supposed to be in?"

"He . . ." she faltered. "Well, he was in earlier. But . . . uh . . . four-fourteen called down to his room about half an hour ago."

Patton got a handkerchief from

his pocket and wiped sweat from his face. "Who's four-fourteen?"

"Miss Payne."

"Tall and skinny?" he ruminated, blinking his eyes in thought. "He go up there?"

"Well, I —"

"Okay, okay. Tell Dick to hold the fort while we take a look."

He turned to Bill as he replaced the phone. "Up in four-fourteen? You had anything here or there this evening?"

"Not since about six. Ice to Miss Payne."

Patton left the door standing open and the light burning as he led the way. The elevator operator stood in the open door waiting for them anxiously.

The buzzer let out a long peal as they stepped in and he said, "Up one floor."

"Somebody on eight getting mighty mad," said the operator. "Was he plumb dead, Chief?"

"Not even half," said Patton. "Let eight keep on being mad."

They turned to the right this time, went about twenty paces and turned left into an intersecting corridor. A dim, red exit light glowed at the end of the corridor marking the fire-stairs.

Patton stopped in front of the fourth door on the left, stenciled 414. Light came through the transom above the door. He knocked rather loudly. The transom was closed and they could hear nothing from inside the room.

Patton waited ten seconds and knocked again. Then he rattled the knob. A frightened female voice came faintly through the wood. "Who is it?"

"Hotel detective. Open up, Miss Payne."

After an interval of fifteen or twenty seconds the door opened reluctantly.

He pushed it and strode into a bedroom that was not quite as orderly as the one they had just visited on the floor below. Miss Payne was shoved back by his entrance, still clinging to the knob.

She was tall and slender, with aquiline features and a somewhat sharp nose, and with lightly gray-ing hair piled atop her head. Her dark eyes flashed angrily at the hotel detective, and she clutched a dark blue, tailored dressing gown tightly about her in front. "How dare you?" she gasped. "What is the meaning of this?"

"I'm looking for Mr. Drood," said Patton quietly, his eyes searching the room that was somewhat larger than 360, with two wide windows directly across and behind the bed, the curtains billowing inward from a breeze that swept in directly off Biscayne Bay on which the hotel fronted.

The bed was neatly made up, and there was no sign of Drood's presence — unless you counted a table placed between two comfortable chairs on the other side of the room which held a tray with a

pitcher of almost-melted ice, a bottle of gin and of Tom Collins mix, each about half full, and two high-ball glasses standing sociably side by side with ice and liquor in both of them.

"Mr. Drood? Indeed?" Miss Payne had a thin, unpleasantly high voice. She tossed her head in regal anger. "The absolute insolence . . ."

"Now, take it easy, Miss Payne." Patton held up a beefy hand to ward off her anger. "This ain't what you think. No harm in a couple of guests having a little drink together long's they don't bother other people. The management wants you to be happy here. But this is something else. I just had a dead man reported in Mr. Drood's room."

He raised his voice somewhat as he said this, and after a moment the tightly closed closet door opened and a portly, middle-aged man stepped out. He was in his shirt sleeves, but wearing a neat bow tie; his shiny face was wet with sweat, his eyes round and frightened. He managed to say, "A dead man, sir? In *my* room?"

"That was the report we got. How long you been here?"

Mr. Drood glanced despairingly at the haughtily silent Miss Payne, and said weakly, "Perhaps half an hour. I just dropped up to . . . ah . . . to see an article of interest in the paper Miss Payne and I had discussed, and she was kind enough

to . . . ah . . . offer me a refreshing drink." He waved with attempted nonchalance toward the tray between the two chairs.

"Neither of you been back to three-sixty since you came up?"

They both shook their heads no.

"And you don't know anything about any dead men in your room, Mr. Drood?"

"Indeed not. I should never allow . . . that is . . . ah . . . *no*. Is this the truth?"

Patton shrugged. "Some kind of crazy hoax, I guess. Did you leave the door of your room unlocked when you came out?"

"I believe perhaps I did. Yes." Drood nodded anxiously. "Indeed, I believe I may have even left the door open. I expected to be gone just a moment, you see; and then, when I arrived, Miss Payne was kind enough to . . . ah . . ." Again he waved toward the drinks.

"Some drunk must have stepped in while you were out and made the call. Well, can't blame you for that. Go ahead and enjoy yourselves, folks. Sorry to've have intruded, but I had to check up."

"Of course you did, Officer. Naturally. We understand perfectly." Drood was very effusive as they went out, but Miss Payne did not echo his heartiness.

"What do you make of it, Ollie?" asked Bill curiously as they went back to the elevator. "Just a practical joke?"

"What else can I make of it? So

long as we don't have a body . . ."

The elevator buzzer was sounding insistently as they re-entered it. Patton said, "Take us all the way down, Joe. Then go ahead as usual. Tell 'em you've been out of order for ten minutes."

In the lobby, he strode angrily around behind the desk to confront Evelyn. "What sort of tricks you pulling, Evvie?"

"No sort of tricks." Her eyes rounded. "Who was it?"

"Nobody." He stood in front of her, flat-footed, both hands on his hips, and his bunions hurt like the devil. "Not a soul in the room. Drood all cozy with gin and sin upstairs in four-fourteen. You answer me that."

"But the call *did* come from three-sixty, Mr. Patton. I swear it did. I left my plug in just to be sure and I checked."

"Then you musta misunderstood what was said."

"No, I . . . I . . ." Slowly Evelyn's mouth widened into a big round O. "I wonder. Gee, gosh, I wonder, Mr. Patton. I'll tell you. When she first said: 'There's a dead man in . . .' I *thought* she said in 'three-sixteen'. That's why I checked my plug so careful and tried to call her back. But the call was from three-sixty, so I just thought for sure I'd been mistaken. I thought she must of said three sixty instead of three-sixteen because that's where the call came from. Golly, do you suppose . . .?"

"Here we go again," said Patton sourly, "Three-sixteen, huh? Whose three-sixteen, Dick?" he called to the clerk.

"U-m-m, that's Miss Paulson. Nellie Paulson. Cute little trick."

"She in now? Buzz her, Evvie."

Dick said, "I don't think . . . no. Her key's in the box. And I think I remember seeing her go out a little while back."

"She doesn't answer," said Evelyn.

Patton turned away from her tiredly and went back to the elevator, shaking his head at Bill this time. "Just to double-check," he said.

When he returned to the third floor, he grimaced at the door of 360 still standing open, turned the other way as he had on the floor above, and into the corridor leading to the left.

He stopped in front of the fifth door on his left this time, 316, near the end of the corridor. The overhead light was dim at this point, and no light showed through the transom of this room.

Patton knocked loudly, waited and knocked again, ordering gruffly, "Open up or I'll use my pass-key."

When nothing happened, he got out a ring of keys, selected one and unlocked the door. He stood on the threshold and reached inside for the wall switch, blinked at a replica of Miss Payne's room as the lights came up.

The interior was neat and orderly, a little warm because the windows were closed. He stolidly went through the motions of checking the room, found nothing at all out of order, and left it a few minutes later.

Returning to the elevator, he glared at the open door of 360 as he waited for a car. Now his feet were hurting so bad he'd have to soak them in hot water before getting back to sleep.

9:37 P. M.

A narrow alley runs beside the Hibiscus Hotel from the street in front to the stone breakwater at the rear of the ten-story building. It is used only by delivery and garbage trucks which must back either in or out between the hotel and the brick apartment house on the other side of the alley.

At night, even when there is a full moon (except when directly overhead), there is black darkness at the bottom of the narrow slit between the two tall buildings. On this night there was only a sickle moon in the sky.

The running girl stumbled as she emerged suddenly from the blackness of the alley onto the lighted sidewalk. As she went down to both hands and one knee, she threw a terrified glance back into the alley behind her. She could see nothing, but she distinctly heard the running footsteps pursuing her.

Absolute terror mingled with hysteria to distort her features into a grimace of horror. She was on her feet instantly, running wildly along the sidewalk away from the lighted hotel entrance, like any hunted thing instinctively seeking safety in the darker shadows in that direction.

The headlights of a car on the street behind her picked up her fleeing figure at the same moment the man slid to a stop on the sidewalk at the spot where she had fallen. He looked quickly in both directions as the car drew abreast of him, saw her in flight half a block away and started in pursuit.

She looked over her shoulder once, saw the oncoming car and the man just behind it. Her breath was coming in labored gasps and her heart was pumping wildly. She realized there was only one possible chance of escape, and she whirled off the sidewalk directly in front of the fast-coming headlights, waving her arms above her head frantically and resolutely remaining at a point where she would be run down if the driver did not stop.

There was the blat of a horn and the angry scream of brakes. Fortunately the brakes were good and they held on the dry pavement. The car lurched to a stop with its bumper inches from the girl's knees.

It was a taxi without signal lights to indicate it was cruising

empty. The uniformed driver leaned out angrily to shout at the frightened girl, but she darted around the left headlight and past him to claw open the rear door, gasping, "Please go on . . . *fast*. Please, *please*."

She was inside and slammed the door shut. The driver turned his head to argue with her, but her fist pounded on his shoulder as she sobbed out, "Go on! Before he gets here. Can't you see . . . ?"

The driver could see she was young and beautiful and terrified. He also saw through the rear window the figure of the running man on the sidewalk behind them. He grunted sourly and threw the taxi in second and stepped on the gas. When the car leaped forward it threw the girl back against the rear cushion. Only at that moment did she become aware of the other passenger in the right-hand corner beside her. It was a woman, sitting very erect and staring at her in complete bewilderment.

"I'm . . . I'm terribly sorry," choked out the girl. "Please let me ride just a few blocks until I can think what to do. Please don't stop where he can get me."

She was addressing both the driver and his passenger impartially, and the driver tossed back over his shoulder curtly, "It's all right with me, lady, long as my fare don't mind. That your old man chasing you back there?"

They were two blocks from the

hotel now, and he turned a corner, let the motor idle down while he half-turned his head interestedly.

His original passenger said quietly, "It's all right, of course, driver." She had a young and throaty voice, and spoke as calmly as though it were the most ordinary thing in the world for her to share her taxi with strangers who came running desperately out of dark alleys gibbering with fright.

The running man slid angrily to a panting stop half a block north of the Hibiscus Hotel as the taxi ahead of him gathered speed and the red tail-lights grew dimmer and then disappeared around a corner.

He gritted his teeth together hard and slammed one fist into an open palm in a gesture of frustrated anger. In the light from the street lamp at the corner ahead where the taxi had stopped to pick up its passenger, he had seen the name of the taxi company and the car's license number.

He hesitated only a moment, then turned and strode back to the hotel behind him. Entering the lobby, empty except for the desk clerk and switchboard operator whispering together excitedly, he glanced around and went directly to a telephone booth near the door with a local directory on the shelf outside.

He looked up the street address

of the taxi company he sought, made a notation of it and moved quickly to a car parked at the curb just south of the entrance. He'd get the information he needed there . . .

9:48 P. M.

Driving southward at a moderate pace on the right-hand lane of Biscayne Boulevard as it entered the city, Michael Shayne glanced sideways and downward, approvingly, at the brown head of Lucy Hamilton pressed lightly against the shoulder of his white linen jacket.

He was bare-headed, and his coarse red hair was ruffled pleasantly by the early-Autumn night breeze. His big hands were loosely on the wheel and a pleasant feeling of complete contentment and relaxation gripped him.

This was the really good time of the year in Miami, he reflected. The worst heat of the summer had passed, yet the vanguard of sun-seekers from the North had not yet arrived to take over the Magic City. He hadn't a single case in his files, and probably wouldn't have another for a month or more—until the quick-money boys and the suckers arrived in droves and his particular talents would become much in demand.

Lucy rubbed her cheek unashamedly against his right bicep, said in a muffled voice, "Wake me

when we get home, Michael. I'm afraid that last glass of champagne knocked me for a loop."

He chuckled indulgently. "I like you when you're looped, angel."

"What a horrible thing to say." She lifted her head momentarily in order to be properly indignant, and then snuggled it back again.

"Not at all," he protested cheerfully. "You sort of take your hair down and forget about being the prim and proper secretary."

"As if I were ever that," she scoffed.

"Of course you are. You never make a semblance of a pass at me during office hours. I have to take you out, buy you an expensive dinner and ply you with Pol Roger before you act properly human."

"Pol Roger? You know darned well that champagne came from California."

"Anyhow, it looped you. And we'll be home pretty soon and I'm going to take advantage of your condition and kiss you."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why bother?" Her voice remained muffled and sleepy, but an underlying note of intensity crept into it.

"Why bother kissing you?" he asked in perplexity.

"Exactly."

He drove on down the Boulevard, maintaining the same steady, relaxed pace, as he pondered her question and his reply. Basically,

he knew what she meant. And it was difficult to find an intelligent answer to her question. Because he liked kissing her, of course. But that wasn't enough. Not enough to really answer the question.

What she was really asking was — where did it get them?

And the only honest answer to that was — nowhere, really. She didn't ask that sort of question often. Mostly, she seemed perfectly content with "things as they were". To drift along through the days as a cheerful and most efficient secretary in his office — to accept without question as many evenings like this as he could contrive for her, or wanted to contrive for her.

He stirred uneasily and lifted one hand in an unconscious gesture to tug at the lobe of his ear. Very quietly, he asked, "Would you change things if you could, Lucy?"

She sat up then, and moved slightly away from him as though this tack in the discussion required a little more formality between them. "I don't know." Her voice was grave and honestly dubious. "I just don't know, Michael."

They were below 79th Street now, rapidly approaching the side street that led to her apartment.

He turned his head to briefly study her profile in the street lights, and she met his gaze intently. For a moment there was a queer sense of strain between them. He broke it by turning his attention back to driving and saying lightly:

"Maybe time has caught up with us, angel. I feel this is a matter for serious discussion over a drink. Any cognac at your place?"

"You know there is. Whatever was left in the bottle the last time you were there."

"I never feel sure. Can't get it out of my thick head that one of these days you'll start feeding some other guy the stuff."

"Maybe I will. One of these days."

Neither of them said anything more until he drew up to the curb in front of her apartment building and got out. He went around to open the door for her, took her elbow to help her out, then put his other hand under her other elbow and held her a moment looking down into her lightly flushed face. She made no move to push closer nor to draw back. She stood quiescent, waiting.

His fingers tightened on the soft flesh of her arms and his voice was unaccountably husky as he said, "Lucy?"

She said, "Yes, Michael?"

He bent to brush his lips across her forehead just below the tendrils of brown hair, then turned her to tuck her arm into his and led her toward the entrance.

There was a small foyer, and Lucy unlocked the inner door with a key from her purse. He held the door for her to precede him inside and up the single flight of stairs. Following her closely, Michael

Shayne's red head remained level with her slender waist.

There is something peculiarly intimate, he thought fleetingly, about a man following a woman up a flight of stairs. Something almost decisive about it. As though, somehow, a die had been irrevocably cast. It was a crazy thought and he tried to brush it aside. He had often followed Lucy up these same stairs for a night-cap after spending a pleasant evening together. But unaccountably it was different tonight, and felt a surge of gladness within him that it was different.

She turned aside at the first landing to unlock her front apartment. He waited silently until she turned on the light, and then followed her inside. She wore a semi-evening gown of very dark blue silk that had a sort of glitter to it. It was perfectly simple, cut low in front and back and with narrow straps over the shoulders that left a good portion of creamy flesh bare.

He watched her speculatively as she crossed the long pleasant room toward the kitchenette, saying over her shoulder with a faint smile, "Make yourself comfortable while I get out the makings."

It was easy to make oneself comfortable here, he conceded as he dropped into a deep chair beside the sofa and lit a cigarette. The room was uncluttered, but nicely and intelligently furnished.

He stretched his long legs in

front of him, leaned his head back and closed his eyes and let smoke come out through both nostrils.

All right. Why didn't he marry Lucy? Tonight, he decided grimly, he was going to face the question squarely. He was going to ask her to face it squarely with him. Something neither of them had done before, though they had been on the verge of it many times.

He straightened up in the chair as he heard the swish of her full skirt re-entering the room. She carried a tray with a squat bottle of cognac, a four-ounce wine glass, a tumbler with ice cubes in it for herself, another tumbler filled with ice and water for him to sip while he drank cognac from the wine glass.

She set the tray down on a low table in front of the sofa, seated herself in the corner close to Shayne's chair, and filled the four-ounce glass with cognac. Then she poured an inch in the bottom of her tumbler, and held his glass out to him.

Her telephone rang before he could take the glass.

An extraordinary change came over Lucy's face. The shrill, insistent ring of the phone shattered her placidity as the glassy surface of a still pond is shattered by a stone being tossed into the center of it.

She continued to hold the glass out for him, and said hotly: "I shan't answer it. It'll be for you, of

course. No one would be calling me at this hour."

"All the more reason for you to answer it," said Shayne. "It might be important."

"A blonde?" she asked tautly.

He said easily, "Or a brunette." The telephone kept on ringing. With a gesture of impatience, he rose and crossed to it in two strides. He swept it up with his back to her and said, "Miss Hamilton's apartment," into the mouthpiece. Then he said, "That's right," and listened, his right hand going up to rub his jaw absently.

Watching him, Lucy Hamilton compressed her lips tightly and set his untouched glass of cognac back on the tray. It was a limp gesture of surrender.

With his back to her, he said incisively, "All right, Pete. I'll be there in five minutes."

He replaced the phone and turned, shaking his head sadly though his gray eyes were alert and not at all unhappy.

"Sorry as the devil, angel. But that was . . ."

"A blonde," she supplied for him. "A blonde in distress. Just dying to weep on Mike Shayne's broad shoulder."

"Pete didn't say," he returned absently, looking around for his hat and then remembering he hadn't worn one. He suddenly became conscious of the bitterness on her face, and stepped contritely forward to touch her cheek with his

fingertips. "This really sounds important. You know I've told the hotel never to bother calling me here unless it was."

"I know," she said dully, looking down so her eyes would not meet his. "So why don't you get on your white charger and ride? What's keeping you?"

"You know I'm sorry," Shayne said again. His jaw tightened when she still refused to look up. He glanced quickly at his watch, turned to the door. "Keep that drink for me. I'll be back before midnight," he said.

10:00 P. M.

The lobby of Shayne's hotel was deserted except for the night clerk behind the desk and one young woman nervously smoking a cigarette in an over-stuffed chair on one side facing the doorway when Shayne entered it.

He glanced at the woman briefly as he went to the desk. She appeared quite young and pretty, wore a dark skirt, a white blouse with a light gray jacket over it, and had a red patent-leather handbag in her lap. Her eyes followed him as he strode to the desk where Pete leaned forward eagerly, his thin face screwed up in a grimace, pale eyebrows moving up and down with excitement.

"I didn't know whether to call you at Miss Hamilton's or not, Mr. Shayne." He kept his voice fur-

tively low, as though he feared being overheard. "But you did give me that number once, for me to try if I thought it was important, and this time I decided it was. She *said* it was, see? And acted scared to death. You know, looking back over her shoulder like she thought she was maybe being tailed . . . like the devil himself might be after her. And you told me once before it was all right to send somebody up to your room to wait for you to come back, and so I thought . . ."

"If they were pretty enough," Shayne reminded him with a grin. "Is she?"

"Yeh. Real pretty." Pete's answering grin was relieved by Shayne's evidence of good humor, and it took on a sly man-to-man quality. "Not, that is to say, for my money, anything like as hot a piece as this here other one sitting yonder." He jerked his thumb toward the girl with the red pocket-book. "But then she didn't come in till later, see, so I couldn't very easily send her up, too. Could I?" he asked anxiously.

Shayne rested one elbow on the counter and pivoted to look at the girl across the lobby. Watching them closely, it must have been evident to her that she was under discussion, for she promptly got up and hurried toward them.

She was extremely well filled-out for her age, which didn't appear to be more than twenty, and her but-

tocks twitched provocatively as she approached. Her eyes were very light blue and had a peculiar glassy quality, lashes and brows so thin and light as to seem almost nonexistent. She had too much lipstick on a very full and pouting mouth which she spread in a hopeful smile as she came up fast, asking, "Are you Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne nodded without speaking, studying her through narrowed eyes as she looked past him at Pete and demanded viciously, "Well, why didn't you say so? You promised me as soon as he came in . . ."

"And I just came in," said Shayne quietly. "I'm afraid I haven't time for—"

"You've got time for me." Her fingers caught his arm and tugged at it, pulling him away from the desk toward a corner where they would be out of ear-shot. "It's terribly important," she hurried on in a too-consciously throaty voice for one so young. "I've been waiting and waiting and just about going crazy wondering what I'd do if you didn't get back in time. But it's all right because I know he'll still be there if you go right away. He was there fifteen minutes ago. The Silver Glade. It's right down the street."

She had her leather bag open as she spoke, and was digging into it groping for something. Her hand came out with a four-by-six photograph of a young man which she thrust into Shayne's hand.

"That's him. Please hurry so you'll be waiting outside when he comes out. Then follow him wherever he goes."

Shayne shook his red head bluntly. "Sorry, but I'm already working. And if it's a divorce job. . ."

"What does it matter to you what sort of job it is? I can pay you. How much? Please! It probably won't be more than half an hour." She was digging in her bag again, and came out with a roll of bills. She began to peel twenties off it, pausing on the fifth to look at Shayne hopefully, then detaching two more as he kept on shaking his head stubbornly.

He held the photograph out for her to take back, but she pushed it away, saying fiercely, "You can't refuse. He'll be gone before I can get anyone else." Her voice became tremulous with supplication, and she pressed herself close to him, looking up into his eyes beseechingly and pouting her too-red lips invitingly.

"Pretty please." She tried to force the seven bills into his hand. "I'll be waiting for you to report. At my place. Alone." The last four words were a throaty, unveiled invitation.

He said, "No," shortly, wishing she were old enough to realize her too-blatant perfume wasn't at all as seductive as she probably imagined it to be. He pushed the man's photograph back into her hand and turned away impatiently, but she clung to him and tried to pull him

back, sliding the photo into his jacket pocket and continuing to try and force the bills into his hand.

He kept on toward the desk, thrusting her aside impatiently and she finally gave up and stood still, staring at him with both hands on her hips, her pale blue eyes glittering with fury.

Shayne didn't look back at her, and Pete was grinning widely. "Sure got 'em fighting over you tonight, Mr. Shayne. Now if that there one was to push up to me like that. . ."

"Is the one up in my room anything like her?" Shayne interrupted impatiently.

The clerk shrugged. "She's scared." He lowered his voice and looked past Shayne. "This'n came in a few minutes ago, and *she* wanted to go up to your room to wait for you. But I wouldn't tell her the number no matter what kind of eye she gave me. Didn't tell her you already had one client waiting up there."

"Fine," said Shayne impatiently. "Don't give her my number." He turned to the elevator where there was a car waiting, and lengthened his stride when he saw her start moving toward him again.

Her running heels clacked loudly behind him as he strode in past the grinning operator and snapped, "Shut the door fast."

The operator got it shut before she reached the car. Shayne mopped sweat from his forehead with

his sleeve and answered the operator's grin with one of his own. He said, "Up, Jack. And no matter what methods of persuasion that doll tries to use, don't bring her up to my floor. You got that?"

10:06 P.M.

Shayne's first impression of the girl who cowered away from him at the other end of his sitting room was that she was quite young and pretty, a honey-blonde, and practically frightened to death by his abrupt entrance.

She straightened herself, still tremulous as he closed the door firmly behind him, and asked quaveringly, "Are you Mr. Shayne?"

"Of course I'm Shayne," he said irritably. "You came here asking for me, didn't you? This is my room. Who did you think would be coming in?"

"I didn't know. I've been so horribly frightened waiting. I thought *he* might have followed me here somehow."

Shayne said, "He?" She still stood flat against the wall as though she were afraid she couldn't stand up without some support, and her whole body trembled as though gripped by an uncontrollable ague. He moved toward her slowly, with a feeling that any sudden movement on his part might frighten her into complete hysteria.

"The man who . . . killed my brother," she gasped out. "That is,

I guess he did. I know he must have. If . . . if my brother is really dead. But he *is*. He must be. I saw him, I tell you. You'll believe me won't you, Mr. Shayne? You won't think I'm crazy when I tell you?"

Shayne was close to her now. Close enough to stretch out an arm and take hold of one of her wrists and pull her forward gently away from the wall, guide her to a deep chair. He made his voice calm and soothing as he said, "Of course I'll listen to you. Just take it easy now. What you need is a drink first. Brandy or sherry?"

"A little sherry, please." Her voice had lost its hysterical shrillness, was low and faltering. "You've just got to believe me."

Shayne didn't reply. He got down a bottle of cocktail sherry and one of cognac, went into the small kitchen and reappeared a few minutes later with a tray holding wine glasses and a tumbler of ice water. He moved a small table close to the girl's chair, put the tray on it and poured her a glass of sherry, sat across from her.

"Drink that first . . . all of it . . . before you say anything else." He filled his own glass with cognac and took a pleased sip of it, regretfully remembering the untouched glass he'd left in Lucy's apartment just to come over here and listen to some sort of loony story about an hysterical girl's brother who must be dead but maybe wasn't after all.

"Now," he said when she'd emp-

tied the glass. "Tell me about your brother. You say he's been murdered?"

"Yes. I tell you I saw him. Lying there dead, right in front of my eyes. But he *wasn't* there when I came back. He was gone. Vanished." She shuddered violently and flung out both hands. "But he couldn't be. Dead men can't just get up and walk away, can they?"

"None of them I've met," Shayne agreed absently. "You'd better start at the beginning and give me all of it."

"Yes. Of course." She nodded as though she thought Shayne was just wonderful to have thought of that.

"It began tonight, really. Well, 'way back before tonight, I guess you could say. With my brother being weak and foolish about girls, I mean. I've always sort of looked after him. Ever since father died four years ago. He's two years older than I am, actually, but, well . . . he always needed looking after, sort of. You know, girls."

She paused, biting her underlip tensely, her light brown eyes looking past Shayne as though they gazed at something far-away or long-ago.

"Let's get back to tonight," suggested Shayne.

"Of course." She gave her head a little jerk and smiled timidly. "Well, we're at the Roney Plaza. For the past two weeks. And I've been seeing the signs. I *knew* he

had some girl on the string and I'd have to be taking a hand soon, but . . . Well, tonight, about nine o'clock he called me and he was terribly worried and frightened. He said I had to come over right away. To the Hibiscus Hotel here in Miami. To room three-sixteen. I made him repeat it and I wrote it down so there wouldn't be any mistake. So I got a taxi to the Hibiscus at once." She paused to swallow hard, and Shayne leaned forward to pour more sherry in her glass. She appeared not to notice him.

"So I went right up to the third floor," she continued in a strained voice, "and to room three-sixteen. Light came through the transom, but no one answered when I knocked on the door. I . . . I knocked three times and called out his name, and then I tried the knob. It wasn't locked. It opened right up. And the first thing I saw was my brother lying on the bed right across the room. He was in his shirt sleeves and his coat was rolled up under his head and there was b-blood. There was a big jagged hole in his throat. His eyes were open and glazed." She put her face down suddenly into her hands and began sobbing.

Shayne let her cry it out. He lighted a cigarette and drank half his cognac and took a sip of ice water. When her shoulders began to stop shaking, he said quietly, "The sooner you get on with it, the

sooner I may be able to do something."

"I know. Of course." She lifted a tear-wet face and swallowed hard. "I didn't even go all the way up to him. I didn't have to. I *knew* he was dead. I was about to use the phone in the room, but then thought of spoiling fingerprints on it . . . if they might be clues, you know, and I remembered that when I got off the elevator I'd noticed a door standing open to a lighted room. So I flew down there to ask them to report it, and the door was still open but no one was inside. So I grabbed up that phone and called down to the switchboard and told them. Then I went back. It couldn't have taken more than two or three minutes. Four at the very most. I *know* it couldn't. But the door to three-sixteen was shut when I got there . . . and I know I'd left it open. But the light was still on, and when I tried the knob it opened just as it had before. *But he wasn't there any more.* He just wasn't! And there was no sign of anything wrong. No coat. No blood. Nothing."

"Sure it was the right room?"

"Of course I'm sure. I'd checked the number as soon as I found the door closed. So I ran inside and saw he wasn't there. I looked in the bathroom and the only closet, under the bed. I ran out into the hall and—he jumped at me." She stopped, breathing hard as she relived the horror of the moment.

"Some man I didn't recognize," she went on more slowly "I'm positive I never saw him before. The light in the hallway was dim, but I got one look at his face as he jumped at me. A horrible, scarred face. I whirled around and ran in the opposite direction toward a red signal light showing the stairway. He shouted something I couldn't understand and ran after me.

"I never looked back once I knew he must have murdered my brother and I'd be next. I tore through the door and down three flights of stairs and there was an open door at the back leading out to a narrow pitch-dark alley. I ran as fast as I could toward the lighted street with him behind me shouting for me to stop. And just as I got to the street a taxicab came along and I jumped in front of it and made the driver stop. Then I tumbled in and shouted for him to drive away fast and he did. And then . . . and then I didn't know what to do and the driver was awfully nice and when I told him sort of a little bit of what had happened . . . he mentioned you and said you could help me if anyone in Miami could and he brought me here."

Shayne got up, crossed to the center table, thumbed through the phone book, gave a number. A moment later, he said, "Ollie? Mike Shayne. Any excitement at your place around nine-thirty?"

He listened while the girl sat twisted in her chair so she could

watch his face. Finally he said, "Thanks, Ollie. Any time I can give you a hand. . . ." He hung up and returned to his chair with a scowl.

"The house detective at the Hibiscus gives it about the way you tell it. The first part, that is. They don't know anything about you being chased out of the hotel. They had the call you say you made from three-sixty about a murdered man and they went there first because the switchboard girl thought you must mean that room instead of three-sixteen which she first thought you said. But they checked both rooms carefully and found no body nor any trace of murder. So they didn't report it to the police, naturally. Thinking it was a hoax . . . or the work of some nutty female." He studied the girl's face carefully.

"You think so too, don't you? That I'm crazy? That I'm just making it all up?"

"Not necessarily. The man chasing you through the alley sounds real enough. Did the taxi driver happen to see him too?" he added casually.

"Yes, he did. And also the lady who was in the cab when I hailed it. You can ask them both."

"Get the number of the cab or the driver's name?"

"N-no."

"Or the name of the other passenger?"

"No. Oh, you're just as bad as I

knew the police would be," she flared out, getting to her feet abruptly and swaying a little. "How can I *prove* it? But I know my brother's been murdered. I saw him. It wasn't any hallucination."

"Sit back down," Shayne said soothingly. I'm not denying anything. Let's see if we can figure it out. Is your brother any sort of practical joker?"

"No." She reseated herself stiffly.

"Because," Shayne said, "there is an old gag that's been pulled off with a bottle of ketchup."

"After the victim's throat has been cut?" she demanded angrily. "Mr. Shayne, I saw the gaping hole. And his *eyes*. Staring and . . . dead."

Shayne got up and began to stride back and forth across the room. "You didn't go all the way in the first time? Didn't make even a cursory search?"

"No. My only thought was a telephone."

"So the murderer could have been in there, hiding." Shayne shrugged. "If it weren't for the man chasing you, I'd have to think you had some sort of hallucination about seeing your brother. As it is, I still don't see what I can do, but I'll go over to the Hibiscus with you and get hold of the house detective and check the whole thing a little more thoroughly."

The idea of returning to the Hibiscus appeared to frighten her all over again, and she asked despairingly, "Do I have to? Go there with

you? Can't I just be your client, and you do the checking?" Her hands eagerly opened the black suede bag in her lap. "I've got money here. Plenty of cash. I can pay you a retainer."

Shayne shook his head. "Right now I'm not at all sure there's any case for me to take a retainer on." He didn't tell her the truth—that he didn't like crazy clients and wasn't at all convinced that she wasn't as nutty as a fruit-cake.

But the look of utter desperation that settled over her at his words moved him to go on hastily, "Suppose I nose around and see what I can find out? If anything has happened to your brother, it'll be time enough to talk about a retainer." He stood up briskly. "I suppose I can reach you at the Roney? What's your name and room number?"

"Do I have to go back there?" She shuddered and her eyes were liquidly appealing. "Whoever did that to my brother must know where we're staying. I keep seeing that awful, scarred face. I . . . I . . . couldn't just stay here while you go and see?"

Shayne hesitated, his angular face tightening.

Not unkindly, he said, "I don't think that would be such a good idea, but I've got a much better one." He crossed to the center table and opened a drawer to take out a sheet of his office paper. With a pen he wrote Lucy Hamilton's name

and address on it, and added a brief note:

"Angel: .

"Be just that and take care of the bearer. Put your chain on the door and don't let *anyone* in until you hear from me. She may be in great danger."

He signed the note "Mike", and handed it to her to read.

"My secretary," he explained. "We'll go down and I'll put you in a taxi for her place. No one can possibly find you there, and I'll know exactly where you are when I need you."

Her eyes shone mistily with gratitude as she read it. Her voice quavered. "You're . . . just wonderful. I could kiss that taxi driver for bringing me to you."

Shayne turned away from her before her gratitude spilled over into kissing him instead, because that was what her look portended.

At that moment there was the sound of loud footsteps in the hall outside. They stopped at his door and there was an authoritative knock.

"It must be he!" she muttered. "I knew he'd follow me here. Don't let him in! Please don't let him in!"

Shayne said, "For God's sake," impatiently and started toward the door. She grabbed him and tried to hold him back as there was another knock and a harsh voice demanding, "Open up, Shayne."

"Please," she cried piteously, clinging to him. "I'll die if you let

him in. Isn't there any place I can go?"

Shayne looked down at her curiously. Her face had gone all to pieces with terror. She clung to him limply as a rag doll.

Shayne put his hands on her shoulders and turned her about. "Go in the kitchen. There's a latch on the inside. Lock it and stay there until I call for you to come out." He gave her a gentle shove, stood there and watched her scurry back to the kitchen and close the door.

The knocking and demands for entrance continued at the front door, and he turned and stalked to it grimly, jerked it open to confront a tall young man with a scarred face who stood on the threshold.

10:20 P. M.

The scarred face, almost level with Shayne's, was red and contorted with anger or some other emotion, but it was not fearsome or hideous as the girl's description had led Shayne to expect. Indeed, discounting the scar on one cheek and the evidence of undue emotion, Shayne perceived it would have been a pleasant, almost handsome face—of a well set-up man in his early thirties.

The scar ran diagonally from the left corner of his mouth upward to the point of a rather high cheekbone, and Shayne guessed that normally it would not draw too much

attention. But now it was a white weal against the suffused flesh and stood out clearly.

Shayne stood flat-footed and immobile in the doorway, glowering at his visitor who moved to push forward, demanding furiously, "Where is she? What's happened to Nellie?"

Shayne put a big hand against the younger man's chest and pushed him backward. He growled, "You haven't been invited in. What the hell do you mean by this ruckus?"

"You're Shayne, aren't you?" The young man glared back at him defiantly and his hands balled into fists. "I'm coming in whether I'm invited or not, and no two-bit private dick is going to keep me out."

Shayne studied him speculatively, his gray eyes bleak. He said, "Whenever you're ready to try your luck, bud."

For a long moment their eyes locked and held. The younger man's blood-shot and humid, Shayne's coldly challenging. Then with a supreme effort of will, his visitor forced his body to relax. He unballled his fists and blinked a couple of times, wet dry lips with his tongue. He said hoarsely, "I'm sorry I tried to barge in. I'm Bert Paulson and I'm so goddamned worried about Nellie I'm just about off my rocker."

So, that makes two of you, Shayne thought to himself. Aloud, he said, "That's better. Keep it that way and maybe we'll get along."

He swung abruptly on his heel to let Paulson enter, walked back to the tray holding his cognac glass still half-full. He made no attempt to conceal the bottle of sherry and the glass the girl had used. He took a sip of cognac and turned to see Paulson striding belligerently in, looking all about the room and at the three closed doors leading to bathroom, bedroom and kitchen suspiciously.

"So her name is Nellie?" said Shayne pleasantly. "Funny, but I just now realize she didn't tell me."

"Where is she? What's happened to her, Shayne? What in the name of God made her act that way when she saw me? Unless she's really slipped a cog this time." Paulson's eyes burned into Shayne's. "How did she act? She's not irrational? . . ." He thudded his right fist into his palm. "Damn it, Man! Don't you see. . . ."

"I don't see very much right now," Shayne interrupted him. "So far as I could tell she made at least as much sense as you do right now. Calm down and try to give me a coherent story."

"Did she tell you about screaming and running from me in the hotel the moment she saw my face?"

Shayne nodded, taking a sip of cognac. "And about you chasing her down the backstairs and through the alley, and how she escaped from you by the skin of her teeth by hailing a cab. How'd you

manage to trace her here, by the way?"

"I got the license number of the cab and found the driver and asked him. But *why* is she afraid of me, Shayne? She knows I'd never do anything to harm her." Bert Paulson looked younger than his thirty years at that moment. Young and hurt and completely bewildered.

"That's not the way she gave it to me," Shayne told him drily. "She claims she doesn't know who you are. That she never saw you before in her life. She suspects that you murdered her brother, and . . ."

"Her *brother*?" Paulson's look of astonishment was ludicrous. "*I'm* her brother. Didn't she tell you that?"

Michael Shayne sat very still. "No," he said. "She didn't tell me that. In fact she assured me she had seen the body of her murdered brother in room three-sixteen at the Hibiscus Hotel no less than ten minutes before you jumped at her in the corridor as she came out of the room."

Paulson went slack in his chair. "I'm Nellie's brother," he told Shayne slowly. "I'm not dead, as you can well see. Now do you realize the condition she's in? Why I'm so worried? Why I have to find her and take care of her?"

Shayne said, "I can see that all right. If you *are* her brother and *are* telling the truth. But you see, I got a completely different story from her. She came here and hired me to

protect her from *you* . . . describing you perfectly, including the scar. And she also wants me to find out who cut her brother's throat tonight and how they got rid of the body. So you can see," he ended reasonably, "it puts me in a dilemma. Until I find out which one of you is telling the truth."

"But I can prove it," said Paulson vehemently. He reached into his hip pocket for a wallet, opened it and began pulling out cards. "I've got identification. I can prove I'm Bert Paulson . . . look. . . ."

Shayne didn't glance at the cards. "And I can easily prove I'm Mike Shayne. But if I told you I had a sister named Nellie who had suddenly gone crazy and thought I was going to kill her, that wouldn't *prove* I was her brother."

"Nellie and I live in Jacksonville. That is, we did live there until I got pulled into the Korean war. Mother died while I was overseas, and when I came back I found Nellie living alone and apparently liking it. She had a good job in Jax and seemed to be enjoying being on her own."

He paused and looked down at his hands for a moment, resuming with apparent effort. "Maybe I was wrong, but I thought maybe it was just what she needed. Mother was always . . . sort of over-possessive, I guess you'd call it. Even with me. And Nellie never had been able to call her soul her own. She had a nervous breakdown when she was

sixteen and spent several months in a sanitarium. I always felt it was entirely mother's fault. So when I came back and thought I'd settle down back in Jax and Nellie could sort of keep house for me, I saw she resented it. In fact," he went on slowly, nibbling his lower lip in concentration, "she blew up all over the place when I suggested it, and accused me of being as bad as mother about wanting to hold her down."

"Well, she was twenty and earning her own living." He spread out his hands and looked at Shayne helplessly. "I didn't know. I loved her and wanted to protect her, but . . . I just didn't know. I decided maybe it was best to let her go it alone. So I got a job in Detroit. From her letters I thought everything was fine."

"That was up to two weeks ago when I got a wire saying she was in trouble."

"What sort of trouble?"

"She didn't say. It was a funny wire. Wild and . . . well, sort of incoherent. So I wired her to hold the fort and drove down. Straight through to Jax in twenty-six hours. When I got there she'd vanished. No one knew where she had gone. So I hired this private detective in Jacksonville, and this afternoon he reported to me he'd located her in Miami . . . at the Hibiscus Hotel. Room three-sixteen. And I knew something was awfully funny, because always before when we came

to Miami we stayed at the Tropical Arms where they knew us and all. So I jumped in my car and drove down here as fast as I could. It was about nine-thirty when I reached the Hibiscus."

"And?" prompted Shayne when Paulson stopped again, his gaze withdrawn and inward as though the memory rankled horribly.

"Well, I went to the elevator and up to the third floor. As I walked down the corridor toward three-sixteen, I saw the door stood open and light was coming out. When I was about eight feet away, I saw Nellie coming out fast, running almost. She saw me and screamed and really started running in the other direction. I've thought and thought about it," he ended wearily, "I admit the hall there was dim and she was coming out of a brightly-lit room, so maybe she *didn't* recognize me in one glance. That might explain . . ."

"It wouldn't explain," said Shayne sharply, "her story about being registered at the Roney Plaza Hotel with her brother, and going to the Hibiscus at 9:30 in response to a call from him and finding him lying on the bed in three-sixteen with his throat slit wide open."

"But there wasn't anybody in the room, dead or alive," protested Paulson. "I'm positive. I glanced in through the open door as I ran past after Nellie. The room was empty."

Shayne nodded slowly. "I know. That fits her story, too. About the

body of her brother disappearing from the room while she was telephoning for help from another room."

"But *I'm* her brother," fumed Paulson helplessly. "Let me see her, Mr. Shayne. Let me talk to her. You can be right there and listen. Don't you see she needs help . . . making up a crazy story about me being murdered and then running away at the sight of me?"

"Somebody," agreed Shayne, "is sure as hell making up a crazy story." He drummed blunt fingertips on the arm of his chair indecisively, then went to the telephone and called the Hibiscus Hotel again. When the switchboard answered, he asked, "Do you have a Miss Paulson registered? Nellie Paulson from Jacksonville?"

"Three-sixteen," Evelyn replied at once. "But Miss Paulson isn't in just now."

"Thanks," Shayne said, and hung up. He nodded to Paulson who had risen and was looking at him eagerly. "That much checks. Miss Paulson has room three-sixteen and she isn't in."

"Well . . . what are you waiting for?"

"One more detail." Shayne called the Roney Plaza on the Beach from memory. He asked again, "Do you have a Miss Paulson registered? Miss Nellie Paulson from Jacksonville?"

It took quite a bit longer to get an answer this time. And it was

decisively negative: "Sorry, but we have no Miss Paulson."

Shayne hung up. "I guess it's about time we tried to straighten this out." Without further explanation, he strode to the kitchen door and knocked on it. "Nellie. This is Mike Shayne. It's all right to come out now."

Bert Paulson ran toward him, his face contorted with anger. "Damn it! Do you mean to say she was in here all the time you were stalling me along? Why didn't you—?"

Shut up," warned Shayne angrily. "I promised her I'd get rid of you before I called her out. If she hears you still here . . ."

He turned and knocked more loudly on the door. "It's okay, Nellie. Unlock the door. I give you my word it's all right to come out."

There was no response from the kitchen. Paulson shoved Shayne aside and rattled the knob frantically. "Nellie! Do you hear me, Nellie? It's Bert, darling. Bert! Don't you hear? Everything's all right. I swear it is. I've been so worried."

Shayne stood aside with a bleakly saturnine look on his face while Bert pleaded through the closed door for his sister to come out. After a few minutes attempted cajolery got them nowhere, Shayne said, "If you'd kept your damned mouth closed until she unlocked the door, everything would have

been all right. As it is . . . the way she seems to feel about you . . . she's probably gone down the fire escape to the alley exit by this time."

"The fire escape?" Paulson whirled about, his scar standing out strongly on his cheek.

Shayne said sardonically, "If you'd let me handle it . . ."

That was as far as he got before Paulson whirled and threw his weight against the door. The hook and eye holding it on the inside gave under the impact and the door crashed open.

One glance showed them the kitchen was empty. Paulson jumped for the kitchen-door and found it unlocked, jerked it open and stepped out onto the fire escape landing to peer anxiously downward.

He reappeared with his face dark with rage. "She's gone," he panted. "God only knows where. Or what she'll do next. Damn your soul to hell, Shayne. It's *your* fault. If you'd told me at the beginning . . ."

Shayne caught his shoulder and whirled him about as he started to run out. "Take it easy. Maybe she had a hell of a good reason for ducking out before you broke that door down. You and I are going down to police headquarters and..."

Bert Paulson's right hand darted inside his jacket and reappeared holding a Colt's .45 Army automatic aimed squarely at Shayne's

belly. His lips drew away from his teeth in a wolfish grin as Shayne hesitated, trying to decide whether to jump him or not.

"Don't do it, Mr. Detective. I'd just as soon kill you as any of those men I killed in Korea, and don't forget it. *You* can go down to police headquarters if you want, but you'll go alone. I've had enough *talk*. You don't seem to realize Nellie's out there in the night alone somewhere. With God knows what sort of hallucinations running through her head.

"I'm going out to find her, by God." He was backing away steadily toward the front door as he talked, the big gun held unwaveringly in line with Shayne's middle.

"Don't make a move forward," he warned. "Not one step or I'll let you have it. I swear I will. She's *my* sister and I'm responsible for her."

He fumbled behind him with his left hand for the doorknob, his eyes feverishly bright on Shayne. "Don't try to follow or stop me. Somebody will sure as hell get hurt."

He opened the door and glided out, closed it behind him fast.

Shayne sighed and walked slowly to the tray and poured himself a drink. Nellie should be perfectly safe with Lucy by this time, or at least in a cab on her way to Lucy's. There was no possible chance for Bert to find her there. In the meantime, Shayne had a lot of questions to ask in different places.

It was quite dark, but she could see the spidery iron steps leading down the single flight alongside the building to a dimly-lit side alley which led to the street.

Reaching the bottom she moved swiftly toward the street. She had his secretary's address in her suede handbag. He had sworn she would be safe there. No matter what story he had been told, she felt she could trust him not to betray her whereabouts. He would know where she had gone as soon as he found the kitchen empty, she told herself thankfully. If she could only find a taxi now.

There was a single female figure on the sidewalk ahead of her and a couple walking hand in hand half way up the block. The girl was strolling very slowly as though she hadn't a care in the world, a large red handbag swinging carelessly from a strap over her shoulder.

And she probably hadn't, thought the distraught one to herself as she approached rapidly. Miami must be full of people who hadn't a care in the world, who could stroll unconcernedly along any street in the city without fear—

She had a sudden, brief feeling of recognition. Yes . . . yes it *was* the girl who had been so nice to her in the taxicab.

"Goodness!" the girl exclaimed, falling into step with her as one friend might who'd abruptly dis-

covered another. "It's you! What a nice surprise! Is everything all right? My, that was so exciting in the cab. Nothing ever happens to me," the girl added resentfully.

This was better than running, less conspicuous . . . two girls walking along sedately together. She said, "I never expected to see you again. How on earth do you happen to be here?"

"I stopped to see a friend on Brickell the other side of the bridge, and it's such a lovely night I decided to walk back, part of the way at least." The girl linked their arms together as they neared the intersection, and steered her across the street, saying happily, "Let's sit on a park bench for a minute. You've got to tell me all about it. I'm just torn to pieces with curiosity. Is Michael Shayne half as attractive as they say he is . . . with that red hair and all?"

"Attractive?" she asked, dropping wearily onto a bench. "Yes, I guess so. He's *nicel*!"

"Why on earth were you in such a hurry to get away from him then?" the girl purred.

"I . . . I . . . oh, it's all so mixed up. I don't know what to do. I'm so frightened."

"You poor thing."

"Oh, it's all so impossible I just can't make anybody understand. Even Mr. Shayne. I don't think he believed me at all."

"That's a shame. What are you going to do now?"

"He gave me an address. A note to his secretary where I can stay and he says I'll be perfectly safe. I should go on."

The other's hand was tight on her arm, pulling her down to the bench. "It's dark here. No one can see us on this bench. I'm just dying to have you tell me what it's all about."

"Well, I . . . I guess maybe I do owe you some explanation. You were so nice." She sank back onto the bench thinking it would be good to talk to someone else and see how her story sounded. Maybe that way it would become clearer.

"I was at the Hibiscus Hotel because of my brother," she began. "I'm staying at the Roney Plaza, and . . ."

It was dark on the palm-shrouded bench in the park with only a slim sliver of a moon overhead. Dark and silent except for the low murmur of the girls' voices as they sat close together.

And after a time that murmur ceased and there was complete silence for a moment, then the sound of a brief struggle and a low, gasping, "A-h-h-h."

And then more silence.

And then a single set of footsteps coming out of the darkness and the silence on the gravel path to the streetlights to seek a cruising taxi.

And a girl getting in the rear seat and settling herself composedly in the corner and opening a black suede purse to take out a sheet of paper and read the address in

Michael Shayne's handwriting aloud to the driver.

10:34 P. M.

Before starting out to look for answers, Michael Shayne telephoned Lucy.

Her voice was acidly sweet as she replied in mock surprise, "Not finished with the blonde so soon, Michael?"

"All finished," he told her cheerfully, "so I decided to sic her onto you. She's not there yet?"

There was a tiny pause, during which he knew Lucy was trying to decide whether he was kidding or serious. Then she said, "Not yet."

"She should be showing shortly. Be nice to her, angel. She's really in a state."

"Because you got rid of her so fast?"

Shayne growled, "This is serious, Lucy. Her name is Nellie Paulson . . . at least, I guess maybe it is. I don't know whether she's actually nuts or not, but she's scared out of her wits. There's a guy out on the town hunting her with a gun who claims he's her brother and wants to take care of her. But *she* claims this guy murdered her brother and is after her now."

Lucy said pleasantly, "What interesting people you do meet, Mr. Shayne. Just what am I supposed to do with this damsel who doesn't know whether her brother is a murderer or murderess?"

"Just keep her quiet there and take care of her," growled Shayne. And don't let anyone get to her. Call me as soon as she gets there," he added hastily. "I'll be at police headquarters. In Gentry's office, if he's still there, if not, check with Sergeant Jenkins."

Lucy said, "Yes, Michael," in a subdued tone.

"Lucy . . . thanks."

He hung up and got his hat, went down to drive direct to Miami police headquarters.

Will Gentry was still in his private office. He was closeted there with Timothy Rourke, reporter on the *News* and one of Shayne's oldest friends in the city.

Will Gentry was a big, square man, with a florid, open countenance. He sat behind a wide, bare desk, chewing vigorously on the short butt of a black cigar, while Rourke was tilted back in a straight chair against the wall, just finishing what he considered an extremely funny story as Shayne walked in.

". . . and so the gink said, 'What cow are you talking about?'" concluded Rourke, and began laughing uproariously.

Chief Gentry said, "Ha-ha," while looking at Shayne. "Anything up, Mike?"

Shayne pulled a chair close to Gentry's desk. "Had any unexplained corpses tonight, Will?"

"No corpses of any sort. You?"

"I'll be damned if I know," said Shayne, feelingly. "Had any sort of

report of trouble at the Hibiscus Hotel?"

"I don't think so." Gentry looked at the reporter. "You had anything, Tim?"

"Not a thing all evening to make the Night Edition." Rourke tilted his chair forward so all four legs were on the floor, leaned his cadaverous body forward eagerly. "Got something, Mike?"

"I'll still be damned if I know. Let's see what you two masterminds make out of this. Lucy and I had just settled down at her place for a night-cap when the clerk at my hotel phoned me . . ."

Shayne went on to tell about his return to the hotel, his first brief encounter with the young woman in the lobby who was so eager for him to take on an immediate tailing job, his interview with the other girl upstairs, and Paulson crashing in and leaving with the .45 in hand. Shayne omitted only the fact that he had given the girl a note to Lucy and told her to go there, ending the first part of his story with her locking herself in the kitchen while he admitted the man with the scar on his face.

"So, what do you make of it thus far?" he demanded.

Chief Gentry took the soggy cigar butt from his mouth and regarded it with intense distaste. "The Hibiscus should have notified us," he growled, reaching for a button on his desk. "I'll get Patton in and . . ."

"Wait a minute, Will. Ollie's okay. He gets paid a salary to keep things as quiet as he can for the hotel. You know that. Besides, what was there for him to report? He found no evidence of murder."

"All right," said Gentry. "Sure, Ollie's okay, but these hotel dicks are always covering up. Was the girl drunk or nuts?"

"Not drunk," said Shayne. "Nuts, maybe. How do you tell? Her story sounded straight enough when she was telling it."

"Was this guy's scar a fresh one, by any chance?" asked Tim Rourke with interest. "One that just healed up this evening?"

"He claims he got it in Korea," Shayne said briefly. "From the looks of him, I've no reason to doubt it."

Rourke frowned. "Look, Mike." His voice became reflective. "Did you say Paulson? Bert Paulson? From Jacksonville, huh?"

"That's what he said. Offered identification cards to prove it."

Both Shayne and Gentry remained silent while Tim Rourke rocked back in his chair again, carefully placed the tips of ten fingers against each other in front of his nose and studied them with a frown. They both respected his encyclopedic knowledge of current affairs as reported in the newspapers and his prodigious memory, and they waited to see if he could dredge anything up for them.

"Paulson? Yeh, Hell, it's been

quite recent. Last two or three weeks. Jacksonville?" He closed his eyes a moment in fierce concentration, then snapped his fingers.

"Got it! Badger game. Girl named Nellie Paulson and her brother. Only they tried it on the wrong sucker two weeks ago and he called cops. It wasn't much of a splash. Just a couple of lines in the *News* here. They both got clean away. Beat it fast when the guy refused to pay off. Jax should have a pick-up out on them," he added to Gentry.

"Doubt if they'd bother," Gentry grunted, leaning forward to open the inter-com on his desk and speak into it. "Those badger games are hard to pin down. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred the sucker refuses to prefer charges."

A voice came back over the inter-com from the Records room and stated that no Paulson was currently listed as wanted.

Shayne said, "For once, Tim, your vaunted memory—"

"My vaunted memory is exactly what it's vaunted to be," snapped Rourke. "Will is right. The Jax police probably didn't bother to put out a pick-up, knowing there wouldn't be a conviction. But you call them, Chief, if you want to verify it."

Gentry looked inquiringly at Shayne.

He nodded angrily. "Check on it, for God's sake! This thing has got me going around in circles. If the

girl and her brother are mixed up in something like that, it changes everything."

There was a knock on the door and a uniformed man entered with a sheet of paper, handed it to Gentry.

Will Gentry laid his cigar aside, glanced through it and told Shayne placidly, "Tim was correct. Bert and Nellie Paulson. Thirty-one and twenty-two respectively." He glanced on across the typed lines, muttering, "Blonde. Five-feet-four. Hundred eighteen. Brown Hair. Five-ten. Hundred-fifty."

He paused a moment, frowned, and then put the sheet down. "Nothing here about a scar on his face, Mike."

Shayne's jaw was set and the trenches showed deeply in his cheeks. "Did I hear you read that right? Height five-ten and weight a hundred-fifty?"

Gentry referred to the sheet again. He nodded. "That's right. And no scar."

"So he was lying," Shayne said thickly. "He's not Bert Paulson at all."

"Guess not," said Gentry cheerfully. "Here's something else. It says they have evidence this isn't the first of these stunts the Paulson brother-and-sister team have pulled. Two others in the past three months that didn't get reported until this was in the papers. I thought you said your Bert Paulson had been living in Detroit and just

came down in answer to a wire from his sister?"

Shayne nodded grimly. "That's what he told me."

The telephone rang. Chief Gentry answered it, said, "Hi, honey," after a moment, and extended it to Shayne. "Your ever-loving and long-suffering secretary on the wire."

He took it and Lucy said, "She's here, Mike. You told me to call you."

"Swell." He made his voice light and bantering. "You keep it right there until I get around. Before midnight as I promised."

He hung up and grinned. "Just reminding me she's still got that drink of cognac poured out and waiting for me."

11:00 P. M.

At approximately the same time Shayne was putting down the telephone after Lucy's call, the same flat voice from Communications came through once more on the inter-com. "Report just came in of a male body found floating in the bay. Throat cut. Ambulance dispatched to pier at Tenth Street to pick up for morgue. Man named Raine in rowboat struck body and brought it in."

The three men in Will Gentry's private office sat very silent for a long moment. Then Shayne said, quietly, "The Hibiscus fronts on the bay, doesn't it?"

"Right on the edge overlooking it," Rourke agreed.

Shayne got to his feet and the others followed suit. He said, "If either three-sixty or three-sixteen face the east . . ."

Gentry nodded. It's time we took another look at the Hibiscus. We can go to the morgue from there."

They went out together, parting at the end of the corridor with Gentry going ahead for his own car, Rourke and Shayne turning out a side door to ride together in the detective's Hudson.

They made it to the Hibiscus in a few minutes, and as Shayne pulled into the curb in front, Gentry's automobile with two uniformed men in the front seat nosed in behind them.

The trio entered the hotel together, and Dick and the bell-captain snapped to attention when they recognized the bulky figure of Miami's Chief of Police.

Dick spoke hurriedly over his shoulder to Evelyn, and as they came up to the desk he said brightly, "Good evening. Do you want Mr. Patton? He'll be right out."

Gentry nodded. He asked. "What third-floor rooms front on the bay? Either three-sixty or three-sixteen?"

"Why, three-sixteen does, Chief. Three-sixty is . . ."

Gentry nodded, turned from the desk as the house detective came wheezing around the corner toward them. He said, "Evening, Ollie," shaking hands briefly. "You know

Shayne and Tim Rourke, don't you?"

"Sure." Patton nodded at the reporter and detective. "Tried to call you a short time ago, Mike. You know, you asked me to keep in touch if anything more came up on the Paulson's?"

"Yeh. What?"

"Her brother was in here asking for her. Big guy with a scar on his face. Just drove in from Jacksonville, he claimed. He wanted to wait up in her room for her. Funny thing was, he decided he didn't want to wait when I offered to go up and sit it out with him. In fact, he made a funny excuse to beat it . . . saying he'd be back."

Gentry said, "Interesting. Let's go up and have a look at this room where you keep your bodies hidden, Ollie."

As they went to the elevator in a solid group, Patton said forlornly, "Hope you don't think I was negligent about not reporting all this crazy stuff, Chief. As a matter of fact, we're not even sure which room the body was supposed to be in. And then when there wasn't any body at all . . ."

Shayne said flatly, "It was three-sixteen, Oliver. Miss Paulson explained to me about the mix-up in room numbers. After seeing her brother in three-sixteen, she rushed out to find another phone to report it on. Three-sixty was conveniently open and she used the phone in there. When she got back a few

minutes later, the body had disappeared."

"Her brother's body?" Patton asked in puzzlement as they went up. "But I've just been telling you he was here looking for her."

"He's not her brother," Gentry said. "We got a description of him from Jax."

"He had plenty of identification," Patton protested. "I made him show it when he wanted in her room."

The elevator stopped and they got out. Shayne said, "He showed me his identification, too."

Patton led the way down the dim-lit corridor. "Maybe that begins to add up then," he offered. "Scar-face said he just got in from Jax, but our elevator boy swears he's been around before. Either earlier in the evening or last day or so."

"Yeh," it adds up," Shayne agreed. "He was here about ninety-thirty."

Patton knocked at 316 perfunctorily before fitting a key in the lock. He opened the door and reached inside to turn on the overhead light, then stepped back.

The three entered and stood staring at the smoothly made-up bed standing directly beneath two closed windows. The only way to reach the windows which were almost level with the bed to open or close them was to get on the bed or move it from the wall. Gentry went to the rear and told Shayne,

"Take the front and let's move it out. None of you touch the bed. These windows closed when you looked in before Ollie?"

"Yes. I remember noticing because it was hot. Most guests keep them open all the time."

Gentry grunted as he and Shayne moved the bed two feet nearer the center of the room. He and Shayne circled from opposite ends of the bed and stood side by side studying the windows without touching them. Through the panes, they could see the riding lights of half a dozen yachts in the Municipal Basin not far distant. They were ordinary sash windows that could be raised or lowered and they weren't latched. There were outside screens with hooks and eyes to hold them shut. Both screens were hooked now, but without closer examination it would be impossible to know whether either had been unhooked recently or not.

Looking downward as directly as possible without opening the windows, they could see tiny white-caps rolling in from the bay, and could hear them breaking lightly on the stone wall directly below.

Gentry stepped back with a shrug, saying, "Nobody touch anything. I want this room kept locked, Ollie, until my boys go over it. Did you touch anything at all when you were first up here? Smooth the bed or anything?"

"Nothing, Will. I just looked in

the bathroom and closet and under the bed to make sure there weren't any corpses."

"Water directly below these windows?" pursued Gentry. "No strip of sand to catch a body if it were shoved out?"

"Only at low tide. There's about ten feet of sand then. It was high tide about nine tonight. Going down now."

Will Gentry nodded, moving toward the open door. "About all we can do here. Lock the door, Ollie. I'll send a man up to guard it until the Identification Squad gets here. And for your information, there's an All Cars out on both Nellie Paulson and the lad with the scar who's carrying her brother's wallet around with him. I'll put a couple of men downstairs in case either of them show."

"Sure. Whatever you say, Chief. Uh . . . you got reason to believe a man was killed in this room tonight? His body shoved out the window into the bay?"

"Right now, it's a good bet," said Gentry placidly.

Shayne pulled away from the curb slowly, and Rourke slouched down beside him and lit a cigarette, speaking for the first time since they entered the hotel:

"What do make of it now?"

Hunched over the wheel, Shayne growled, "Let's take a look at what's waiting for us in the morgue before we do any more guessing. You know every damn bit as

much about all of it as I do."

"Only difference is," Rourke stated, "you talked to the girl personally and we didn't. If she isn't nuts . . ."

"Doesn't it begin to look more and more as though she isn't?" demanded Shayne. "It sounded haywire at first when she claimed she'd seen her dead brother and then scarface claimed *he* was her brother. Now we know he isn't. And with this body picked up in the bay, there's a hell of a good chance we'll discover he was in three-sixteen just as she said and that while she was getting to the phone in three-sixteen the body was shoved out the window."

"By scar-face?"

"It looks reasonable. Hell!" said Shayne with irritation, "I don't know. If he is the murderer and knows she's the only one who's actually seen him and the body in three-sixteen, it would give him good motive for tracing her to my place and trying so desperately to try and get his hands on her."

"And it would explain how he came by Bert Paulson's wallet. If he killed the guy. But what's the Roney Plaza angle she handed you? Why didn't she tell you she was staying at the Hibiscus?"

"That's one of several things," said Shayne wearily, "that I want to ask her the next time she and I have a tête-à-tête."

He slowed his car as he approached a building with stone

steps leading up from the sidewalk, twin lights burning at the top. Will Gentry's official car came up behind them and they went up the steps to the morgue entrance.

Doctor Martin, the police surgeon was waiting for them. Will asked, "You look over the stiff they pulled out of the bay, Doc?"

Martin nodded. "Not much to look at. Throat cut like a stuck pig." The doctor made a slashing motion with the side of his hand from left to right. Very sharp knife or a razor."

"Any identification?"

"Plenty. Bill-fold in his hip pocket with cards and stuff. No money." The doctor looked at them. "I'd say he went into the water quite soon after death."

"Lots of blood?" asked Gentry matter-of-factly.

"Lots."

"What Will wonders," said Shayne, "is whether the job could have been done in a hotel room, say, without leaving any traces of blood behind if he were shoved out a window fast."

"It would have spurted," Martin said. "If a pillow or blanket had been held ready and shoved over the wound fast, it might have soaked up the blood without leaving any around. That what you mean?"

"Or a man's coat?"

Martin nodded his head slowly. "He's wearing no coat, by the way. In his shirt-sleeves."

"Identification?" asked Gentry.

The attendant opened a drawer of the beat-up desk, drew out a manilla envelope. He handed it to the chief who tore it open and withdrew an obviously expensive sealskin billfold that was still heavy with water. There were two credit identification cards from well-known hotels in New York, an accident insurance identification card.

All 'give the name of Charles Barnes, and the insurance card gave an address on East 63rd Street, New York City.

"That's everything we found on him," said Martin. "Not even a buck in the wallet. He's young. Twenty to twenty-five. Healthy. No distinguishing marks. Five-ten or eleven, at a guess. Around a hundred and fifty before the blood drained out of him. You want anything else from me tonight, Will?"

"What?" said Gentry absently. "Five-ten and a hundred-fifty, huh? I guess not, Doc. Unless something comes up. That remind you of anything, Mike?"

"Nothing except the description we had from the Jacksonville police tonight on Bert Paulson." Shayne's gray eyes were very bright. "Let's go down for a look."

The attendant preceded the three men to a heavy door in the rear opening onto a flight of stairs leading down into the concrete-lined cold room. A dank chillness came up the stairs to meet them as they started down. Though air-condi-

tioned, the square room seemed to hold the indefinable odor of all the corpses that had been stored there for varying lengths of time over the years.

There were two white enamel tables under a blaring light in the center of the room, a bank of white, oversize filing cabinets along one wall. Each cabinet had three drawers about six feet long and three feet square.

The attendant went to the lower drawer at one end, and pulled it out its full length on ball-bearing rollers. He flipped back a white sheet to show the naked body lying on its back in the drawer.

The face was chalk-white, paler by far than any dead person Shayne had ever seen before. The eyes were closed, mouth sagging open in a macabre sort of grin. The features were even, and had probably been handsome when the young man was alive. There was a wide, gaping wound in his throat, edges of the flesh cut cleanly as though at one stroke, shrivelled now by exposure to bay water.

The three men stood together silently looking down at the corpse. Gentry said heavily, "Charles Barnes from New York? I wonder."

"Why not Bert Paulson from Jacksonville?" said Rourke. "Description fits. It adds up to the girl's story. If scar-face slit his throat and switched wallets . . . there's your complete explanation,

Mike. Then she did see her brother lying there murdered. Didn't you say she told you his coat was folded up under his head? It could have been used to staunch the blood."

Shayne didn't reply. His eyes were narrowed as he stared down at the dead man. His left hand went up absently to tug at the lobe of his ear.

Without taking his gaze from the white face, he muttered, "I've seen him some place. Recently. I swear it."

Gentry and Rourke looked at him without speaking. He shook his head slowly, "It runs away from me. Like quicksilver. I know I've seen him. Not real familiarity, but it's there. Just beyond my god-damned conscious grasp of it."

He took another long look at the pallid face. He shook his head disgustedly and turned away.

The others followed behind him and the attendant closed the drawer with a soft thud.

Shayne had reached the stairway and started up when he whirled, his face lighting with satisfaction. "Got it! And it raises hell with my nice little theory. That guy on the slab was alive at ten o'clock." He pulled out the photo the girl had thrust into his jacket pocket in the lobby of his hotel.

He gave the photograph to Will Gentry. "See, it's the same man."

"It is," Will agreed heavily, as he studied the picture.

"Which means," said Shayne, "that if he was at the Silver Glade at ten o'clock, he couldn't have been murdered at the Hibiscus at nine-thirty."

"Maybe that girl was mistaken." Rourke stated. "Maybe she just thought he was there at that time. Maybe she was lying like hell."

"But why?"

"I don't know why. Why does any woman lie?"

"If I'd taken the assignment, I was bound to find out at once that he wasn't there," Shayne pointed out.

Gentry said, "But you didn't take it. I wish to God you had. Then maybe we wouldn't have all these other unanswered questions."

There was a telephone listed for Barnes at that New York address and Gentry made the call. It didn't answer. He phoned the police there to forward to his office anything they could on Barnes. "I've got a detective driving down from Jax with a picture of Bert and Nellie Paulson. Nothing to do but mark time, I guess."

Shayne squirmed uncomfortably as the chief made the calls. He wished, now, that he had told Gentry in the beginning about sending the girl to Lucy's apartment. He wasn't quite sure why he had held that fact out. With a vague feeling of protecting her, he supposed glumly. In a sense, he looked on her as a client, and until he knew more about the case

he had instinctively withheld the information that would have automatically brought her in for police interrogation.

Now, with her, he probably had positive identification of the dead man in the palm of his hand; but he hesitated to admit that fact to Will Gentry yet. The chief would be sore as a boil because he hadn't told him earlier, and Shayne still felt there were a lot of things he'd like to know about the case before seeking a showdown with her.

Of course, if she were just a cheap little accomplice in a badger racket in which her brother had gotten himself murdered, he had no sympathy for her at all. But he couldn't help feeling there was something mixed-up in that diagnosis. Recalling her as he had first seen her waiting for him in his room, she simply didn't fit into the picture that way.

He was roused from his brief reverie by the entrance of Sergeant Hopkins of the Identification Squad.

He was young and square-jawed and had a crew-cut, and was not in uniform. He nodded incuriously to Shayne, stood quietly waiting until Gentry finished talking with New York. Then he reported, "We gave three-sixteen the works, sir."

"Well?" Gentry rumbled.

"We got nothing very definite, I'm afraid. Photographs of the bed with careful lighting indicates

someone has lain heavily on it since it was made up. We found no bloodstains. One set of fingerprints pretty well all over, in places that indicate they must be from the occupant of the room . . . another set that we checked out as the hotel maid. Prints of an unidentified man on the door-frame and the back of a chair."

When he stopped, Shayne broke in, "What about the windows?"

The sergeant regarded him stolidly. "Only the occupant's prints there. One of the screens is very tightly latched and probably hasn't been opened for months. The other opens easily and there was no dust underneath or on the sill." He shrugged and added, "On the other hand, the maid says she quite likely opened it herself recently in cleaning up the room. She can't swear to that, so there's nothing conclusive either way. It certainly could have been opened tonight to allow a body to be shoved out, but no way of proving that happened."

Gentry took his saliva-soaked half cigar from his mouth and glared at it. "Fingerprint the Barnes' stiff below. See if they check with the extra set you found in the room and let me know back at the office."

"Wouldn't you know that's about what we'd get?" he demanded savagely as he started out, Rourke falling in beside him.

Shayne let out a deep sigh. "I

guess that puts it straight up to me."

"Puts what up to you?" Gentry stopped, came back.

"You're not going to like it, Will." Shayne grinned at him. "The girl who claims he's her brother."

Gentry's heavy black brows came down threateningly. "You told me she ran out on you. Down your fire escape and disappeared."

"She did. But I somehow forgot to mention that before she went into the kitchen I'd given her Lucy's address with a note to Lucy, and told her to go there."

"Goddamn it, Mikel! Do you mean to say you've got reason to think she's at Lucy's now?"

Shayne kept his grin working and said lightly, "I can do better than that. I know she is. Remember when Lucy telephoned? That was to say she'd arrived safely."

Shayne reached for the telephone hastily as a rumble of anger spilled out from between Gentry's thick lips. "You've got to admit we're lucky to have her on tap this way." He gave Lucy's number into the phone and settled back, not looking at Gentry who was cursing in low monosyllables.

He listened to her phone ring five times before she answered. Then her voice sounded curiously thick, and the words were fuzzy at the edges. "Hello. Who is this?"

"Mike. Have you been asleep?"

"Just dozed off, I guess."

"Well get yourself waked up," he said impatiently. "Both of you. I'm on my way over."

"Both of us? What do you mean, Michael?"

"Miss Paulson. Is she in bed?"

"But she left, Michael."

"What? When? Goddamn it, Lucy, I sent her there for you to take care of her."

"You didn't tell me I was to lock her in. Did you? How was I to keep her here if she decided not to stay?"

"When did she leave, Lucy? What did she say?"

"Fifteen-twenty minutes ago. She didn't say anything. Just thank you for the drink and I tank I go home now. And she went."

Shayne slammed the phone down to prevent himself from taking any more of his sickening anger out on Lucy. He looked up, bracing himself to meet Gentry's fierce gaze, and said unnecessarily:

"She's ducked out on us, Will. God knows where . . . or why."

11:30 P. M.

As Lucy Hamilton put the telephone down in her apartment, she sat silently and with bowed head for a long moment, feeling the impact of her employer's anger and sensing his frustrated disappointment in her as he slammed up at his end.

The only sound in the apartment was the labored breathing of her

guest standing close behind her.

Lucy fought to remain calm, lifting her head finally and forcing herself to turn and ask listlessly, "Is that what you wanted me to do?"

"You were just fine that time. If he calls back again, or anyone else, be damn sure and tell them not to come here tonight. That you're in bed or sick or something . . . or else you get *this* fast."

Lucy shuddered and closed her eyes as the ugly, short-bladed knife made a sickening arc close to her throat. She heard a pleased giggle bubble up out of the other's throat. There was already blood on the blade of that knife. Whose, she didn't know. The girl hadn't said whose blood it was when she calmly withdrew it from her suede bag and displayed it as Shayne's call came through. But the fierce glitter in her eyes as she crisply told Lucy what to say over the phone had been proof enough that she wouldn't hesitate to use the blade again if she were thwarted in any way.

Her captor stepped back coolly as Lucy returned the phone to its cradle. She instructed Lucy to get a sheet. Then she tied Lucy with strips of it so that only her left arm was free—to answer the telephone should it ring again. Then the girl dropped the knife into her open bag and made two phone calls. She asked for Lanny and Bert Paulson, leaving instructions

for him to call his sister at this number. She moved across to the sofa and sat down. She said, "Now we're all set and real comfy. Just don't try to say the wrong thing over the phone if it rings again. If it's someone asking for Nellie or Miss Paulson, just say I'm here and I'll take it from there. But if it's anyone else, you be damn careful to stall them off. No matter what you scream over the phone or how fast they can get here . . . it'll be too late to do you any good." She leaned forward to pick up the drink she had poured herself and smacked her lips with relish as she sipped it.

"I just don't understand," faltered Lucy. "Why did Michael send you here? Why did you *come* when . . . when . . . ?"

"When the police are looking for me for murder? You're perfectly right, darling. That is blood you saw on my little knife." The words came out purring with hidden, deadly menace. It rose suddenly on a note of shrill derision:

"Because he's a fool. Like any man I ever met, he falls all over himself for a smile and a sad story any girl wants to dish out. And by God, how I love to make suckers out of them. I'll tell you all about it because, you know, you're never going to repeat a word of it to anyone." She looked at the telephone broodingly. "This is the safest place to wait for his call. Then . . ." Her gaze shifted back to Lucy.

Get her talking! That was best. Keep her boasting and talking . . . until maybe Shayne got here. *He had to get here.* She glanced sideways at his drink, waiting for him exactly as he had put it down nearly two hours ago.

"I want to get it absolutely straight about the telephone call you're expecting," Lucy said as placatingly as she could. "So I won't make any bobbles that'll get you mad at me. It's someone named Lanny whom you expect to call?"

"That's what I said, isn't it?"

"But when you made your calls I heard you ask for someone named Bert Paulson. And leave word for him to call his sister here. But if it's really someone named Lanny you want, will *he* ask for his sister if he calls?"

"Never mind about who's sister I am or anything." The girl on the sofa turned sullen. "Just you do what I said about answering the phone. It it's Lanny and if he asks for his sister or Nellie, or . . . well, if he just says it's Lanny, you give it to me. Quick."

She fumbled in her bag, took out the knife and studied it fondly. Then, unexpectedly, she giggled. "Oh shucks, why don't I tell you who I really am, and about Lanny and everything? Just show you how dumb your Michael Shayne really is. Take this note he wrote to you to begin with . . ."

Patrolman Cassiday had been a full-fledged member of the Miami Police Force less than a month. He was a well set-up young man who filled out his new uniform snugly. A veteran of the Korean War who had rebelled against the humdrum of a garage mechanic's job after coming back, he was pleased with his new job and extremely proud to wear the uniform and to wield the authority that went with it.

Cassiday's beat was Miami's Bayfront Park. He walked the winding, palm-shaded paths in steady strides, chin up and eyes alert for any sort of mischief a policeman should put a stop to.

That girl and man with their heads close together on the bench for instance—might be romance, and then they might be checking final plans for holding up the First National Bank in the morning.

The young patrolman strode past them sternly and alertly.

In the beginning, less than a month ago, Cassiday had paused often in his patrol to gruffly speak to such young couples who hung their heads in abashed silence at his tone. Innocent love-making on a park bench was all right, and he had orders it was to be tolerated up to a point. But how was a young patrolman to know when that point was reached? Since meeting Ann Schwartz he walked his beat as alertly as before, but with much

more tolerance for the kisses and caresses under a Miami moon.

Ann Schwartz was a dark little girl, with elusive laughing eyes, lush breasts and a softly yielding body. He had first met her at a party at his brother-in-law's house two weeks before, and from that day onward his thoughts were all of Ann as he walked the park at night. Sure he was Irish and she was Jewish. So what?

A man could go to Mass occasionally, he thought, and his wife could go to a synagogue. Why not? At home it wouldn't matter. Not after the lights were out at night and a man was in bed with Ann.

Tolerance, that's what the world needed more of, he told himself wisely. The rippling water of Biscayne Bay was silver in the faint moonlight on his left through gaps in the shrubbery. Farther out, he could dimly see the riding lights of a few yachts anchored in the bay.

He turned sharply away, threading between double rows of palms whose fronds met over his head, heading westward now toward the end of his beat where there was a call-box for his hourly report.

He slowed his pace sharply as he followed the heavily shrouded path. He hadn't learned yet to curb his pace so he came out on time at the call-box. The beat had been layed out for older muscles than his, and he always started out taking it slow and deliberate, but when his thoughts turned to Ann his stride

quicken unconsciously and he was always getting ahead of himself like this.

He was passing the bench without noticing the figure huddled on it when the toe of his shoe struck something in the path. There was a tinkling sound in the gravel off to the side where his foot had kicked the object, and he stopped and thumbed on his flash to turn a circle of light downward.

The beam first picked out a gold lipstick and then a small hand mirror. Beyond them lay a lady's handbag, gaping open. He swung the light back swiftly and something gleamed wetly on the edge of the path beneath the bench.

The beam came up and he saw the girl lying there. The pallid face and sightless eyes, the gaping wound in her soft throat from which the red wetness beneath the bench had come.

He stood stricken and unable to move for at least ten seconds. Then awareness came to him, and he plunged headlong toward the call-box under the street light.

11:34 P.M.

The report of the discovery of the dead girl in the park reached Will Gentry in his office just after he'd received the information that Charles and Mary Barnes had left New York City six weeks ago for a vacation in Miami, their forwarding address, the Roney Plaza Hotel.

When the intercom buzzed, Gentry leaned forward and the voice issuing from it said, "Murdered girl in park near Second Street and Second Avenue. Reported by Cassidy on beat. Throat is cut."

Gentry jerked to his feet, thinking, "So it wasn't a forty-five after all. Another knife job." He left word for Shayne to catch up with him at the park if the redhead contacted the office during the next half hour.

The chief gummed it away fast, but by the time he reached the intersection an ambulance and two radio cars were already there. Spotlights made dazzling bright the cluster of men forty feet down the path gathered about a park bench.

A car pulled in behind the ambulance. Mike Shayne got out. The two men went along together wordlessly. Three policemen standing in front of the bench looked at them silently, then drew back a little. An ambulance attendant was kneeling beside the bench.

Shayne peered over the white-coated shoulder and saw the girl's face. Only a faint grimace passed over his trenched face as he recognized her.

He asked gruffly, "How long ago, Doc?"

The interne shrugged and answered without looking up. "An hour maybe."

"I went over to the Roney," Shayne told Gentry. Mary Barnes

and her brother were registered there, all right. She has a brother without a scarred face."

The chief nodded. "*Had* a brother, you mean." He stepped past Shayne to confer with the young patrolman who had discovered the body.

Shayne walked on a few feet and stopped to lean his right shoulder against the smooth round trunk of a palm. He got out a cigarette and lighted it, controlling the shaking of the match so it was hardly noticeable. He drew in a deep lungful of smoke and expelled it, slowly.

Gentry called to him sharply. "Shayne! Take a look at this!"

He spun his cigarette away, turned to see the chief holding a sheet of paper in his hands.

"It is Nellie Paulson after all. Here's a receipted bill from the Hibiscus for last week's rent on room three-sixteen. And here's some other stuff from her handbag.

Shayne said savagely. "It can't be. It has to be the Barnes girl."

"Take another look at her," invited Gentry. "Are you positive that she's the one that . . ."

"Good Christ! Of course I'm sure," Shayne burst out. "I don't need another look. So she's Nellie Paulson. And the same job has been done on her as on the one that came out of the bay. Barnes or Paulson. God knows. Where does this leave us?"

"Pretty damn well up the creek without a paddle," Gentry said

savagely. "Two in one night. God-dam it, Shayne . . ."

Shayne was looking at him coldly, a muscle twitching in his tight jaw. "This one right near my hotel. All right. I'd say it looks as though she had tried to come back for some more protection from me."

"Getting so it's kind of risky being a client of yours, don't you think?"

Shayne said, "You can't say anything I'm not thinking, Will. But . . . I keep wondering . . . why an ex-G.I. with a forty-five under his belt uses a knife instead of the gun."

"It's quieter. Let's say he just carries the gun along to frighten private detectives so they let him walk out into the night to kill off their clients."

"Let's say that," Shayne agreed flatly, rubbing his jaw and moving off the path to let stretcher-bearers from the ambulance go past. "I'd like to get the maid I talked with come over from the Roney to look at both of them and see if either one are the persons who have been living there as Charles and Mary Barnes."

"Oh, we'll pin down an identification all right," said Gentry bitterly. "As fast as they get killed off, we'll find out who they are."

Shayne continued to disregard his tone. "Will, did the dead man's fingerprints check with the set in three-sixteen?"

"Yes. He's definitely been in three-sixteen since the maid cleaned the room in the middle of the afternoon."

Shayne sighed and started down the path toward his car. Will Gentry clumped along silently behind him. At the sidewalk, Shayne stopped and said, "Let's save the hard feelings until this is over, huh?"

Gentry unexpectedly stuck out his hand. He said, "Sure. Then I'm going to pull your license."

"I think maybe I'll turn it in without waiting for you to pull it, Will." Shayne took his hand absently and without much vigor. "They found no weapon, huh?"

Gentry shook his grizzled head. "Almost exactly the same sort of wound as the other. One fast slash with a hell of a sharp knife. You got *any* ideas, Mike?" The question was almost an entreaty.

"Only one and it's not much good. Something I should have done before."

11:43 P. M.

The Silver Glade was a modest night-spot in the Southwest section not more than ten blocks from Michael Shayne's hotel. It had a floor show and a small dance floor, and it served honest drinks of liquor to natives or to tourists sober enough to notice what they were drinking.

Because it was close and because

the bartender knew Shayne's preference in cognac, the detective was in the habit of dropping into the Silver Glade occasionally for a late drink. When he entered the door tonight the hat-check girl smiled at him brightly and said, "Long time no see, Mr. Shayne," as she took his Panama without bothering to give him a check.

She was a big-breasted girl wearing an evening gown that had been carefully cut to accentuate her bigness. Shayne leaned on the low counter in front of her and pleased her by leering at the deep valley beneath her chin and told her, "I can only stand the rot-gut you serve here ever so often."

He took the four-by-six photograph from his pocket and pushed it in front of her. "For a well-stacked doll, I always figured you were pretty smart. Ever see this guy around?"

She giggled appreciatively and gave her body a little shake to pull the low-cut gown a little lower. "Always kiddin', aren't you?" She leaned forward so he could get a better look, and studied the picture doubtfully.

"Don't remember as I have. You know how it is. Half the time I don't even look at them when I hand out checks . . . unless they're big, ugly redheads, that is."

Shayne said, "Try hard. This evening is what I want. Last two or three hours."

"I swear I can't say. It sure

doesn't ring any bell." Shayne nodded and turned.

Holding the photograph in his hand, he went to the bar where there was an empty stool at one end. The bartender was middle-aged and bland-faced. When he saw the redhead coming to the bar, he turned and reached up to the top shelf to lift down a bottle of Martell that had an ordinary cork in it instead of the silvered pouring spout in most of the other bottles.

He set it on the bar in front of Shayne and uncorked it with a flourish, provided a four-ounce glass and a tumbler of ice water, and said reprovingly, "Don't see you around much, Mike."

Shayne laid the picture on the counter and poured cognac in the small glass. "You notice this bird in here this evening?"

The bartender looked down at it, then reached into his hip pocket for a pair of glasses in a leather case. He hooked them behind his ears and studied the face carefully.

"Can't say that I did, Mike, but that doesn't mean he wasn't in. You know how it is . . . if a man isn't a steady . . . ?"

Shayne said, sure, he knew how it was. He sipped his drink morosely, and a slim, dark man in elegant evening clothes came up behind him and clapped him lightly on the shoulder.

"Glad to see you, Shamus. So long as you're not pinching the joint."

Shayne moved the picture back with his forefinger on it. "You had anybody in this evening that looked like this?"

Salvadore studied it critically, twisting his smooth black head slightly on one side.

"Sure. Dozens of them just about like that. He isn't one you'd pick out of a crowd."

"I know. That's the hell of it. This is really very important, Salvadore. Take it around to the waiters and busboys, huh? Make every one take a long look. If *any* of them think they saw him here tonight, let me talk to them."

"Sure, Mike." Salvadore Rotiselli took the picture away. Henry had moved down the bar to serve another customer, and Shayne glowered down at his drink.

He hadn't much hope of success with the picture. As Salvadore said, the face was too thoroughly ordinary, too completely undistinguished to give anyone reason for remembering it.

But it was all Shayne had left now. If he could prove the dead man had actually been in the Silver Glade after nine-thirty, it would be a cinch he hadn't gone into Biscayne Bay from room 316 of the Hibiscus.

But what would that prove? Shayne asked himself angrily. Bert Paulson? Charles Barnes? A dead girl in the park. Until he looked at her face and at the receipted bill from the Hibiscus, he had been

so dead certain she wasn't Nellie Paulson.

The other identity fitted her so much better. Mary Barnes from New York who was staying at the Roney. Mary Barnes, who had caught a fleeting glimpse of her murdered brother after being summoned by him to the Hibiscus. Mary Barnes who had fled in terror from the man with the scarred face . . . who had sought refuge in his hotel room and then run out into the night still in terror because she did not trust him to protect her from the man she feared.

All those facts fitted what little he knew about Mary and Charles Barnes. They didn't fit what he knew about Nellie Paulson.

He drank his cognac morosely, washing it down with tiny sips of water from the glass while the questions ran around and around and around in his mind.

There was something eluding him. Something important. Perhaps a key to the entire puzzle. Some tiny bit of information he had that he didn't *know* he had.

That wasn't exactly it. He knew it was there. Somewhere in the maze of conflicting stories and reports he had listened to this evening. Something that had seemed wholly irrelevant at the time, yet which might be supremely important.

He doggedly went over and over again in his mind every single

thing that had happened since the telephone call had taken him from Lucy's side.

It was there. Hidden away in his subconscious. He had no idea what it was nor how to go about searching among the half-truths and irrelevancies to dig it out.

Yet it *had* to come. He sensed that time was running out. He glanced down at his watch wondering why he felt that way. While the girl had been missing from Lucy's . . . before her body had been found in the park, it was natural that he had felt fiercely he must find her before something happened.

But that was over now. She was dead and no power on earth could make that part of it right again. He had let her slip away from his apartment . . . had stood supinely by while a man with a .45 walked out to look for her . . . had cleverly concealed her whereabouts from Will Gentry because he had felt capable of handling the thing himself.

For those reasons, Mary Barnes was dead. Why was it that he felt time was running out now?

His watch said 11:43.

And then suddenly he knew. Two hours to midnight when he'd left her; seventeen minutes to midnight now. He had promised Lucy, that was it. That he'd be back by midnight for the drink she had poured out for him.

Salvadore came up beside him

and laid the photograph down with a sigh. "No soap, Shamus. Not one of them will say positively yes or no."

Shayne looked down at the picture wonderingly. As though he had never seen it before. Because now it didn't matter. Because now he *knew*.

He slid off the stool without even thanking Salvadore, went toward the door in long strides, his face bleak with anger and concern at his own stupidity.

He didn't hear the check girl call out to him as he stormed past her. He broke into a trot as he went out the door, ran to his parked car and jerked the door open. A moment later it was roaring away from the curb.

11:45 P. M.

The Tropical Arms Hotel on North Miami Avenue was located between a liquor shop and a delicatessen. The liquor store was still open when Shayne pulled up in front of the hotel and leaped out.

The Tropical Arms was an old hotel, going to seed. There was a big, empty lobby with shabby, rococo decorations, yawning chairs and wilted potted palms.

A drop-light over the desk was the only illumination. Behind the desk was a fat man in his shirt-sleeves. He smelled very strongly of gin.

Shayne demanded, "Do you have

a Miss Paulson?"

"Miss Paulson?" The fat man belched as he shook his head. "No siree, we sure don't."

"Mr. Paulson? Bert?"

"Well, yes now. Mr. Paul—"

"Since when?"

"Just checked in. Not more'n an hour ago."

"What's his room number?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Mister. You wanta talk to Mr. Paulson, I reckon . . ."

"What number?" Shayne's voice rasped like a file on tempered steel.

"Two-ten. But I'm trying to tell you . . ."

Shayne turned away fast and went past the closed door of an elevator to stairs on one side. He climbed two flights and found 210. He knocked loudly and tried the door. It opened on a lighted bedroom. He stood glaring at the huddled figure of a man on the floor beside the bed. An Army automatic lay on the floor beside him. But there was no smell of gun-powder in the tightly closed room.

Shayne pulled the door shut and walked over to look down at the man with the scarred face. His cheeks were very red and his mouth was open and he breathed stertorously. Just beyond his right hand lay a corked almost empty pint bottle of whiskey.

Shayne leaned over and shook him roughly, calling, "Paulson! Wake up, Paulson," in his ear. He

got no response from the man.

He stepped back with narrowed eyes and kicked the drunken man hard in the buttocks. Still no response.

Sighing, Shayne went into the bathroom and turned on the light. There was a rust-stained tub with a shower apparatus on the wall at one end. He went back and got a grip under Paulson's armpits, dragged him into the bathroom and tumbled him inside the tub. He lay there, an inert mass, still breathing loudly and steadily.

Shayne drew the tattered shower curtain to protect himself from the spray, reached a long arm past it and turned on the cold water. The spray hit Paulson full in the face.

The man moaned and feebly lifted one arm to ward off the cold water. Shayne turned it on full force and moved the head slowly, sending the stinging spray up and down the length of Paulson's body. He twitched and jerked and moaned, then sat up suddenly with his eyes wide, grunting, "I'm drowning. Turn it off, I tell you."

Shayne moved the head so the spray took Paulson in the face. He blinked and shuddered, then squirmed to a kneeling position and turned his back on the tormenting water.

Shayne turned it off and pulled the sodden man upright, slapped him viciously, first on one cheek and then the other.

Paulson cried out in surprise and hurt, then cursed thickly and twisted away. Shayne leaned forward and slapped him again. He asked coldly, "Can you hear me, Paulson? Understand what I'm saying?"

"I'm c-cold. Freezing."

Shayne said, "To hell with that. Let's see if you can stand up." He got a grip on his arm and heaved. Paulson helped himself a little and made it to his feet. Shayne dragged him over the edge of the tub, gave him a hard shove through the doorway. He staggered and went flat on his face on the bedroom floor.

Shayne followed and rolled him over on his back, jerked him up to a sitting posture. The madness was going out of Paulson's eyes, being replaced by fear. Shayne got the whiskey bottle and uncorked it.

He held it up to Paulson's open mouth and ordered, "Swallow."

Paulson swallowed two gulps. He coughed and retched and then looked up miserably. "You're Shayne?" His voice was thick but he sounded rational. "Where's Nellie?"

"We'll know after you answer some questions." Shayne moved aside to pick up the .45 automatic. He stood over Paulson with the heavy weapon negligently in his hand. "Hesitate just once," he said, "and I'll break this over your head. Now then. When you reached Jacksonville from Detroit, you found your sister gone. Is that right?"

Paulson nodded dumbly.

"And you discovered she was involved in a badger game rap that she'd been pulling with some guy whom she pretended was you, her brother. Right?"

Again Paulson nodded. He said brokenly, "My fault. All my fault. If I hadn't gone off and left her alone—"

"Shut up," Shayne cut in inexorably. "While you were away, this man she'd been living with and passing off as her brother—who was he?"

"Don' know." Paulson's head weaved from side to side. "I don' know. Hired Jax detective to find her, like I told you. Then I came here . . ."

"You had your sister's room number, and when you reached the Hibiscus you went straight up without calling. This blonde came running out of her room and you thought it was Nellie afraid to face you because of her messing around and getting into God only knows what kind of trouble. But you actually couldn't recognize her in that dim light, could you, since she was moving so fast?"

"Was Nellie," Paulson insisted stubbornly. "Running, but was Nel . . ."

"If you'd come clean in the beginning," Shayne cut him off fiercely, "and told me it *wasn't* her brother who'd been living with her in Jacksonville, a hell of a lot of

things would be different right now. Including one dead girl who might well still be alive."

"Nellie?" Paulson cringed away from Shayne's hard-hitting words. "You mean she's dead? My little sister?"

"Frankly," said Shayne, "I don't know who's dead at this point. But we're going to find out. Get on your feet and let's go to headquarters."

"Can't stand up," groaned Paulson, sinking back on his elbows. "Gotta . . . be sick."

"Then get the hell in the bathroom and be sick." Shayne stood back and swung a number twelve shoe. The toe of it crunched into Paulson's ribs.

He grunted with pain and rolled over and was sick on the floor.

Shayne stood back, gimlet-eyed and restless, until the retching subsided somewhat. Then he reached down and hauled Paulson up impatiently, half-marched him and half-supported him to the door.

11:53 P. M.

Chief of Police Will Gentry was deep in conversation with a tall balding man when Shayne unceremoniously shoved the hulking bedraggled figure of Bert Paulson into his office at headquarters.

Gentry looked up disapprovingly and then his eyes widened as he saw the scar on Paulson's cheek. He said, "So you found him, Mike?

What the hell have my men been doing?"

Shayne said wearily, "I had the jump on them. It finally came to me that he mentioned he and his sister had always stayed at the Tropical Arms when they were in Miami." He jerked his thumb savagely toward Paulson who had subsided into a chair. "Meet Bert Paulson in the flesh, Will."

"You're wrong, Mike." Gentry shook his head and turned to the man seated beside him. This is Lieutenant Neils from Jacksonville. Mike Shayne. He brought down a picture of the girl and her brother." He gestured toward a blown-up 8x10 photograph lying on his desk.

Shayne leaned over his shoulder and studied the picture of a smiling girl and a young man in bathing suits with their arms intertwined about each other. The man whom he had dragged out of the Tropical Arms definitely did not resemble the one in the picture. He couldn't be so sure about the girl. The sun was in her face and she was squinting as she smiled and her image was blurred a trifle.

Shayne said flatly, "I realize that's the guy you're after, Lieutenant, but his name is not Paulson. Bert will tell you the whole story," he went on impatiently to Gentry. "And Bert's okay; he really was trying to catch up with his sister and save her from getting into deeper trouble. I should have helped him. Or he should have

levelled with me. Oh hell, no use going into that now. I've got to know just one little thing. That girl in the park. What sort of purse did she have, Will?"

"Purse?"

"Handbag. You know. What color?" Shayne demanded savagely. "Red or black?"

Gentry pursed his lips thoughtfully. "It was red. Why?"

Shayne stood there, staring, as everything inside him tightened into a sickening knot. "God, Will," he said. "Jesus God!" And then he was running.

It was something like sixteen blocks from police headquarters to the apartment, and Shayne covered the distance in something like sixty seconds. He cut his motor off swinging into the block that held her apartment building, cut off his lights and slid silently to a stop directly across the street.

The curtains were drawn at her front windows, but edges of light showed around them. Shayne got out and closed the car door quietly, crossed the street to the foyer and went in.

He had a key on his ring that opened both the downstairs inner door and also her apartment which Lucy had given him more than two years before, all tied up with a pink ribbon, making a laughing ceremony out of it and jesting about the depravity of a girl who gives her employer a private key to her apartment.

Shayne had been touched by the gift, and he had been very careful never to use it. He had a special signal he always rang on her bell from the foyer so she would know who was calling.

Tonight, he didn't ring her bell. He got his keys and picked out the shiny new one that had never been used, and carefully inserted it in the lock.

It turned easily and he went in.

He climbed the one flight of stairs slowly and cautiously, testing each tread for squeaks before putting his weight on it. Maybe she's alone, his mind churned, but I hope not. If she's alone . . . he shut off what he might find then.

At the top, he stopped in front of Lucy's door and drew in a deep breath. Sweat beaded his corrugated forehead and crept down the trenches in his cheeks.

He stooped in front of the door and put his left hand on the lock, with thumb and forefinger pressed loosely together in front of the opening to make a sheath of flesh through which he inserted the key without the slightest scraping sound.

When it was firmly bedded, he transferred his hand to the door-knob and pulled on it firmly while he turned the key. Thus, there was no sudden click to betray him when the catch was released.

He turned the knob, keeping pressure on it, and then went into the apartment in a violent lunge.

He caught one fleeting glimpse of Lucy seated in a chair beside the telephone as he went by, but his attention was centered on the other occupant of the room.

Female and blonde and deadly, she sprang from the sofa to meet his rush, the short-bladed knife in her hand.

Shayne went under the vicious arc of the knife and hit her brutally in the bosom with his shoulder and the full weight of his charging body. The impact slammed her back against the wall with a crash and she sank to the floor in an unconscious heap.

Midnight

Shayne wasted one brief look at her face to assure himself it was the girl with the red patent leather bag who had thrust Charles Barnes picture in his pocket in the lobby of his hotel earlier. He picked up the blood-stained knife and then turned to Lucy with a reassuring grin.

Her ankles and her right arm were bound tightly to the legs and arm of her chair with wide strips of cloth that had been torn from a sheet. Her other hand had been left free so she could lift the telephone receiver behind her. Her face was white with strain and her eyes had a glassy look, but she managed to twist her lips in a feeble smile and to ejaculate with spirit:

"It's about time you came back to the party."

"Sorry I cut it so fine, angel." He found scissors in the desk, went to her to kneel and cut her bonds. "You all right?"

"Sure. Just perfect. Aside from my heart being permanently lodged where my Adam's apple used to be. She's insane, Mike! She's already killed two people with that knife tonight. She boasted about it to me. And she was going to cut my throat, too, just as soon as she got the call she was waiting for. She told me just how she was going to do it . . . and giggled while she told me."

Shayne rocked back on his heels and looked up at her sharply. "What call was she waiting for?"

"Some man she called Lanny. He's in cahoots with her and they pretend he's her brother. She left word two places for him to call her the moment he came in. That's all she was waiting for. So she could arrange to meet him. She let me keep on living so I could answer the phone if you or Will or anybody called in the meantime to tell you not to come here."

Shayne cut the last strip of cloth binding Lucy's wrist. She stood up, wincing with pain as she rubbed circulation back into her arm.

He lifted the phone and dialed the number that was a direct line to Will Gentry's office. When the chief's gruff voice answered, he said, "Come around to Lucy's place to pick up your killer. Nellie Paulson. But do this first. Put a fast tap

on Lucy's phone and stake this place out. Nellie's accomplice, whoever he is, is supposed to call here any moment. When he does, Lucy will try to stall him long enough for you to trace it . . . or get him to come here, if she can. You got that?"

He hung up and turned to look at Lucy who had limped across the room and was now seated at the end of the sofa in front of the low table holding the liquor tray. Nellie Paulson still lay in an unconscious heap against the wall beyond the sofa. She hadn't stirred since she crumpled to the floor.

The cognac bottle stood there on the tray, and the glass of brandy Lucy had poured out for Shayne two hours previously. He looked at his watch and grinned wryly as he went to the chair beside the sofa. "Sorry I didn't quite make it by midnight for this drink, angel. I need it," he said simply, reaching for it and lifting it in the air in a silent toast to his secretary.

"You need it. Suppose you hadn't made it before Lanny called? . . ." She shuddered, but kept her tone as light as his. "What made you come *at all*? She'd cut my throat happily if I said one word over the telephone to indicate—what—was going on."

Her aplomb exploded suddenly in great racking sobs. "It was terrible, Mike. Just horrible. She told me every single ghoulish detail after she got started. About killing

a man named Charlie Barnes in her hotel room after he balked about being shaken down in the badger game she was working with this Lanny who has been living with her in Jacksonville as her brother."

"Lucy, I ought to turn in my license for a cat-and-dog ticket the way I fluffed this one. A nice kid named Mary Barnes is dead because Mr. Know-it-all Shayne jumped to a conclusion too fast. I had it all wrapped up neat—send Mary here to be safe and then find scar-face, period."

"But you thought Mary *was* here, safe. Because of what I was forced to tell you."

"One of the things I don't get is how Nellie came to be in my hotel lobby waiting for me with a picture of Barnes when I got there."

"She told me that, too. After she left the Hibiscus, she walked up the street, found a cab two or three blocks away, told the driver to go by the Hibiscus . . . out of curiosity to see if anything was happening. And just then the murdered man's sister, Mary Barnes, came running out of an alley beside the hotel and stopped the cab to get away from a man who was chasing her. Nellie looked back and saw it was her own brother who lives in Detroit. So she just stayed in the cab and heard the driver recommend you as a detective who might help Mary, watched her get out at your hotel. She had the driver drop her a block away, and she walked back. She would

have gone upstairs and killed Mary right then to get rid of the only witness to the fact there had been a dead man in that room. But the clerk refused to give her your room number."

"So she waited until I got there and gave me that story about Barnes being in the Silver Glade, along with his picture. To get rid of me and give her more opportunity and time to get to Mary."

Lucy nodded. "She was furious, she said, when you refused to take her money and went on upstairs. But she figured anyhow she had sort of fixed up an alibi by making you think Barnes was still alive at the Silver Glade at ten o'clock."

He frowned grimly. "Nellie was in 316 of the Hibiscus then when Barnes' sister looked in and saw Charles dead on the bed?"

"Yes. She hid in the bathroom. She told me all about it, as though it was a big joke. How she wound his coat about his throat so the blood wouldn't spill out, and how she pushed him out the window into the bay. Then she ran out of the room and up two flights of stairs and down the elevator without anyone noticing her."

Shayne nodded somberly and refilled his glass. He glanced beyond Lucy and lifted one eyebrow as Nellie stirred slightly on the floor.

"I guess I didn't break her back after all. Did she know her brother also followed me to my place."

"Yes. She kept hanging around

outside in the shadows, hoping Mary would come out and she'd get a chance at her. She saw her brother Bert go in. Mary came out to the sidewalk from a side entrance and she made it seem like an accidental meeting. Then she lured Mary into the park and got her to sit on a bench and . . . cut *her* throat, too.

"Mary felt she was a friend because of Nellie's apparent kindness in the taxi. She told her about your note and that she was coming here. So Nellie left her own bag in the park and took Mary's, caught a cab here and gave me the note. Later, after I'd phoned you to say she'd arrived, she suddenly seemed to realize you might be coming on here to talk to Mary.

"That's when she took the knife out of her purse and showed me the blood on it and gloated about how sharp it was and how it just slid through the soft flesh of a throat like a knife through warm butter.

"And she *wanted* to try it on me, Michael. But she had to stay here while she tried to locate her Lanny . . . who had gone out of the Hibiscus room before she killed Charlie Barnes and didn't even know she'd done it. She knew that if I weren't here to answer the phone when you called, you might get suspicious and come up anyway. So then she tore up a sheet and tied me to the chair and—"

Lucy's telephone shrilled.

She started, looking questioningly

at Shayne. He nodded. "Answer it. If it's Lanny, stall him as long as you can. Tell him Nellie's in the bathroom. Get him to hang on if you can. Will should have a tap on it by this time."

Lucy picked up the phone and said, "Yes?"

She listened a moment, then nodded to Shayne who was waiting intently. "Yes, she's here and she's been trying to call you. If you could hold on a minute? Well . . . she's in the bathroom right now. Hold on and I'll get her. I know she's awfully anxious to talk to you."

She put down the telephone, looking at Shayne anxiously.

He nodded his approval as a scrabbling sound behind him made him swing on his heel.

Nellie Paulson had come back to consciousness enough to have gotten up on her hands and knees. She opened her mouth to scream as Shayne leaped forward and drove the heel of his palm against her mouth before the sound came out.

Lucy watched transfixed, with her own mouth wide open. Shayne whirled and gestured frantically to the telephone on the table.

She understood the gesture and picked it up, asked sweetly, "Are you still there? Nellie will be out in

just a sec. Hold on, won't you?"

She continued to hold the receiver to her ear, and after another thirty seconds her eyes widened at sound of loud voices and a struggle at the other end of the wire.

Then a different voice came to her, "You there, Miss Hamilton? Good work. We got him all right. And tell Mike Shayne that Chief Gentry's on his way up and for him to stay put until the chief gets there."

Lucy replaced the phone and reported the conversation to Shayne. Nellie was sunk back on the floor and lay twisted there, moaning softly with her hands over her face.

Shayne grinned wryly at Gentry's order, and sat back into his chair. "Come over and sit in my lap, angel. I swear I'm never going to leave you alone again."

Lucy went to him slowly, and he caught her wrist and pulled her down onto his thighs. She flung her arms about his neck and pressed her face against his chest.

He held her quivering body tightly and said into the mass of brown curls beneath his chin:

"I mean it, Lucy. Right now I really mean it. Hurry up and kiss me before Will walks in and spoils everything."





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